

# Las Vegas GP shows the highs and lows of F1

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23 NOVEMBER 2023

# AUTOSPORT

LAS VEGAS GP

## Verstappen steals Leclerc's Vegas victory

Why Ferrari star could have won despite Max charge

'What a race – I believe the win was ours'

CHARLES LECLERC

10-PAGE

World  
Endurance  
season  
review



PLUS

Young Driver Award winner Browning takes **Macau GP** after fiery crash



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# Lots of glitz, but did Las Vegas deliver for Formula 1 fans?

The new-look Las Vegas Grand Prix was a mixed bag. The event was always going to struggle to live up to the pre-weekend hype, and the on-track problems that led to the damage of Carlos Sainz's Ferrari, the delay of FP2 and ejection of fans (see pages 4 and 13) was a bad start. But when the proper action got going, the high-speed street circuit provided one of the better contests of 2023.

What the event could really have done with was a shock winner, which by this season's standards simply means a non-Red Bull. And, as Alex Kalinauckas explains in our in-depth report on p16, Charles Leclerc really *should* have won this one. Max Verstappen hasn't needed much luck to take win after win this season but, just like Michael Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton before him, he sometimes gets it anyway. The reverse could be said for Leclerc, who nevertheless helped give the race a fitting climax with a superb last-lap pass on Sergio Perez. Can we have more of that in 2024?

Toyota was the team to beat as the Hypercar era of the World Endurance Championship really hit its stride this year. Gary Watkins explains how the titles were won and picks out his top 10 drivers in our review (p48) – and it's not a Toyota driver who gets the #1 spot.

There was domination of sorts in Macau as F3 returned last weekend. We've known that Luke Browning was a standout talent for a while, but the regular F3 season hadn't suggested that the 2022 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award winner would be such a force around the unforgiving streets. But he was. Jamie Klein was there and reports on the Macau GP (p38) and GT World Cup (p42).



*Kevin Turner*

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# PIT + PADDOCK



SUTTON

## Well it's one for the money, two for the show, three for Verstappen the puritan

### FORMULA 1

In a Formula 1 season where the frequency of Max Verstappen scampering away from pole position has hurt the spectacle, last weekend's inaugural Las Vegas Grand Prix earned strong reviews for the on-track action. There was a protracted battle between Red Bull and Ferrari for the win, which inspired divergent strategies and a Turn 1 controversy, several changes for the lead, and a fine last-lap overtake. Mercedes motorsport boss Toto Wolff said: "When I look back: a spectacular race, great audiences, a mega event and some good racing at the front. That's what I will remember of the inaugural Las Vegas race that ticked all of the boxes."

But it was Verstappen's impassioned

post-qualifying monologue that garnered more attention and praise. The three-time champion entered the Vegas weekend declaring that all the razzmatazz around the race on the famous Strip made the event only "1% sport".

He would embellish that after running third-fastest, saying: "When I was a little kid, it was the emotion of the sport I fell in love with and not the show around it. As a real racer, that shouldn't really matter... When you go to Spa, Monza, these kinds of places, they have a lot of emotion and passion. Seeing the fans there is incredible. I understand that fans, they need maybe something to do as well around the track. But I think it's more important that you actually make them understand what we do as a sport because most of them just come to have a party, drink, see a DJ play or a performance act. I can do that all over the world. I can go to Ibiza and get completely s\*\*tfaced and have a good time."

"If the sport put more focus on to these kinds of things and also explain more what the team is doing, try to see them, what they are achieving, what they're working for – these kinds of things I find way more important to look at than just having all these random shows all over the place."

Verstappen, who would wear an Elvis Presley-inspired race suit for the GP, spoke following a turbulent start to the weekend. FP1 was abandoned after only nine minutes of running when Carlos Sainz's

Ferrari suffered substantial damage from running over a raised water valve cover. This led to FP2 being delayed by 150 minutes while the 30 covers were cemented in place. Similar issues have occurred in Monaco and Baku in recent years. But greater anger was stirred by the way ticket holders were treated in Vegas. Due to the disruption to the night-time schedule, security guards and service staff were reaching the end of their shifts before the track went live again. As such, without significant warning, the grandstands were closed and spectators removed.

The average three-day ticket price was \$1667. In response, those ejected were offered \$200 of free merchandise. Sin City event organisers also issued a statement following FP2 noting how the session was "successfully completed" but did not offer repentance. Although the latter move perhaps had legal implications, the former upset people for seeming to take the wrong self-congratulatory tone.

Following the Thursday night debacle, legal action was launched against the Formula 1 Las Vegas Grand Prix organisation and its contractor to pursue refunds. The Dimopoulos law firm working in conjunction with JK Legal & Consulting filed a class action suit on behalf of the 35,000 spectators it says were at the track. It is asking for payments "in excess" of \$30,000 per spectator, split equally between "general" and "special" damages. The



Police eject spectators before start of FP2

GALLOWAY





ALL PHOTOGRAPHY



Verstappen didn't race  
 in blue suede shoes

DUNBAR

lawsuit alleges “breach of contract, negligence, and deceptive trade practices against the defendants”.

Some took matters into their own hands by tearing down controversial circuit view-blocking screens along the public areas of the Strip during the race. These films had been stickered over bridges and walkways in the weeks leading up to the race only for locals to peel them off. They were reapplied for the weekend, and again removed by members of the public along a stretch opposite the Planet Hollywood casino and hotel, before staff attempted unsuccessfully to replace the screens once more during the event.

Given the off-track failings, when reacting to his second place in the GP, in an interview organised by FOM that certainly toed the party line, Charles Leclerc said: “I think we needed [a good race]. Of course, the weekend didn't start the way it had to start. But I'm so happy that it ended that way... We should have more races like that, where the racing is like that, because it was really enjoyable.”

MATT KEW & ALEX KALINAUCKAS

P13 OPINION

## ASTON SHARE SALE QUELLS STROLL FEARS

### FORMULA 1

The Aston Martin Formula 1 team has sold a minority stake to private equity firm Arctos Partners. This investment is expected to close by the end of this year and, according to the *Financial Times*, values the Silverstone squad at £1billion. Arctos, also working to buy into top French football club Paris Saint-Germain, will provide “deep sports industry knowledge, and a robust network of influential relationships to support its continued growth”.

The future of the Aston Martin F1 team has been



DUNBAR

the subject of speculation, with rumours suggesting that owner Lawrence Stroll is exploring a total sale of the squad he purchased in 2018. But Arctos sees this as the start of a “long-term partnership” with the Canadian, who reckons he and his new associates share a “collective ambition” to keep climbing the constructors' championship from its current fifth place.

Arctos managing partner Doc O'Connor said: “We look forward to collaborating with Aston Martin and view the opportunity as the beginning of a long-term partnership with Lawrence and the entire organisation. This investment is consistent with our firm's strategy, which focuses on backing leading sports brands across North America and Europe.”

MATT KEW



Hamilton's first win for  
 Merc. Only another 81  
 (and counting) to go

SUTTON

## Hamilton car goes for £14m

### FORMULA 1

The 2013 Mercedes Formula 1 car guided by Lewis Hamilton to his first race win for the team was sold in Las Vegas last weekend for £15.1million, a record price for modern-day grand prix machinery. The chassis in question was W04-04, aboard which Hamilton contested 14 of the 19 rounds and most notably won the Hungarian Grand Prix. He also drove it to third place in Malaysia, China and Belgium.

In an event at Wynn's Awakening Theater hosted by TV presenter James Corden, auction house RM

Sotheby's brought the hammer down at a touch under £14m, leaving the new owner with seven figures of tax and sale charges to cough up. That total comfortably exceeded the pre-sale estimate of £8-12m and surpassed the £10.7m paid this time last year for an ex-Michael Schumacher Ferrari F2003 chassis that won seven races.

But it was still a few quid short of the record £19.6m achieved in 2013 by the 1954 Mercedes W196R in which Juan Manuel Fangio claimed his second of five world championship titles.

MATT KEW



## Toyota springs surprise with Miyata F2 move

### FORMULA 2

Toyota left observers of Japanese motorsport stunned on Monday when it revealed that Super Formula champion Ritomo Miyata will race in Formula 2 next season.

Miyata, who at the age of 24 this year became the youngest driver to complete the Japanese 'double' when he added the Super GT title, will also contest the European Le Mans Series in the LMP2 class and serve as Toyota's reserve in the World Endurance Championship.

Toyota's announcement confounded expectations that Miyata would be part of the new ASP Lexus LMGT3 effort in the WEC (see story below), while also revealing that he will not defend his Super Formula title with TOM'S next season.

It is understood that the chance for Miyata to race in F2 came up shortly after he beat Liam Lawson to the Super Formula crown at Suzuka late last month. While



Lawson to Miyata:  
"You should go and  
do some F2 mate"

Miyata's team had not been officially announced as we went to press, sources have suggested that it will be Rodin Carlin, and Toyota insiders have promised that it will be a squad capable of winning races.

The high number of clashes between the WEC and F2 schedules meant that the ELMS was selected as Miyata's second programme. He will join Cool Racing, which has links to Toyota via ex-driver

Nicolas Lapierre, a director of the team.

Miyata still faces a single clash between the Silverstone F2 fixture and the Imola round of the ELMS in early July, but it is understood that he will prioritise his F2 campaign. Toyota has rebranded its 'WEC Challenge Programme' to the 'Global Driver Challenge Programme' to reflect a widening focus beyond WEC.

**JAMIE KLEIN**

## De Vries in Hypercar as Lopez drops into Lexus

### WEC

Nyck de Vries has slotted straight back into the seat earmarked for him for 2023 at Toyota's World Endurance Championship squad. The Japanese manufacturer has confirmed that the Dutchman will replace Jose Maria Lopez in its line-up for next season.

De Vries will race the #7 Toyota GR010 HYBRID Le Mans Hypercar (right) alongside Kamui Kobayashi and Mike Conway. It was intended that he would move up from his role as test and reserve driver to join them this year prior to what turned out to be a short-lived stint as a full-time Formula 1 driver with AlphaTauri.

The reshuffle is the first since Kazuki Nakajima was moved upstairs at Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe and was replaced by Ryo



Hirakawa. Predicted by Autosport as long ago as early September, the merry-go-round involves two-time WEC champion Lopez staying in the family and shifting over to the assault on the WEC's new LMGT3 class with the Lexus marque.

Kobayashi, who also fills

the role of team principal at the TGR WEC squad, described the contribution of Lopez to the team as "massive" since his recruitment by Toyota in 2017 as he welcomed de Vries to the race line-up.

"It is exciting to welcome Nyck back to the team as

part of the #7 crew," said Kobayashi. "We know from his time as our test and reserve driver, plus his other racing, how quick and consistent he is."

De Vries thanked Toyota for its "continuous support and faith in me".

"I was with the team in a different role for a few years but never got the chance to race, so it is great that the time has now arrived."

The line-up of Sebastien Buemi, Brendon Hartley and Ryo Hirakawa in the #8 GR010 remains unchanged.

Lopez will join the French Auto Sport Promotion squad for its projected two-car WEC assault with the Lexus RC F GT3 racer. The Argentinian has already joined its pre-season development programme for a Goodyear tyre test at the Algarve circuit late last month.

**GARY WATKINS**





**FORMULA 1** Many star names and key figures from McLaren’s history gathered in Hampshire earlier this month to celebrate 60 years of Britain’s most successful F1 team. Among those who attended the event organised by long-term McLaren employee Matthew Jeffreys and the team’s former sponsorship coordinator Richard West were Ron Dennis, who was guest of honour, Viviane and Bianca Senna, designers Gordon Coppuck, Steve Nichols, John Barnard and Adrian Newey, double world champion Mika Hakkinen, and Jo Ramirez. Poignantly, Hakkinen was introduced on-stage to Dr Jerome Cockings, credited as the principal first responder who saved the Finn’s life following his 1995 Australian Grand Prix qualifying crash. **Photographs courtesy of Jeffreys/West/Harman**

## Macau GP winner Browning plans push for Williams F1 opportunity

### FORMULA 1

Macau Grand Prix winner Luke Browning hopes his success will help open the door for a test chance with the Williams Formula 1 team. The Briton, who is a member of the Williams Driver Academy, dominated last weekend’s Macau Formula 3 blue-riband.

Browning last month drove a 2021 Aston Martin F1 car as a prize for winning last year’s Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Award, and says he is ready to push Williams for an opportunity there, potentially even in a free practice session.

“I would love it,” he said. “I’ll be asking the team as many times as possible, and I’ll be picking up the phone. But there is a pecking order to this stuff, and

they will have their reasons.”

Browning’s Macau victory comes at the end of a challenging campaign, with a best result of second in FIA F3.

Of his victory, he added: “When you win in Macau, alongside the names of previous winners like [Ayrton] Senna, to put my name on the list, it’s a bit surreal. But it was surreal even turning up. I’d never been to China or Macau before, so to get off the plane, and you’re in a completely new place halfway across the other side of the world and playing with margins this fine, is incredible. But I have loved every minute and I’m very grateful to win.”

**JONATHAN NOBLE**

**P38 MACAU GP**



MACAU GRAND PRIX

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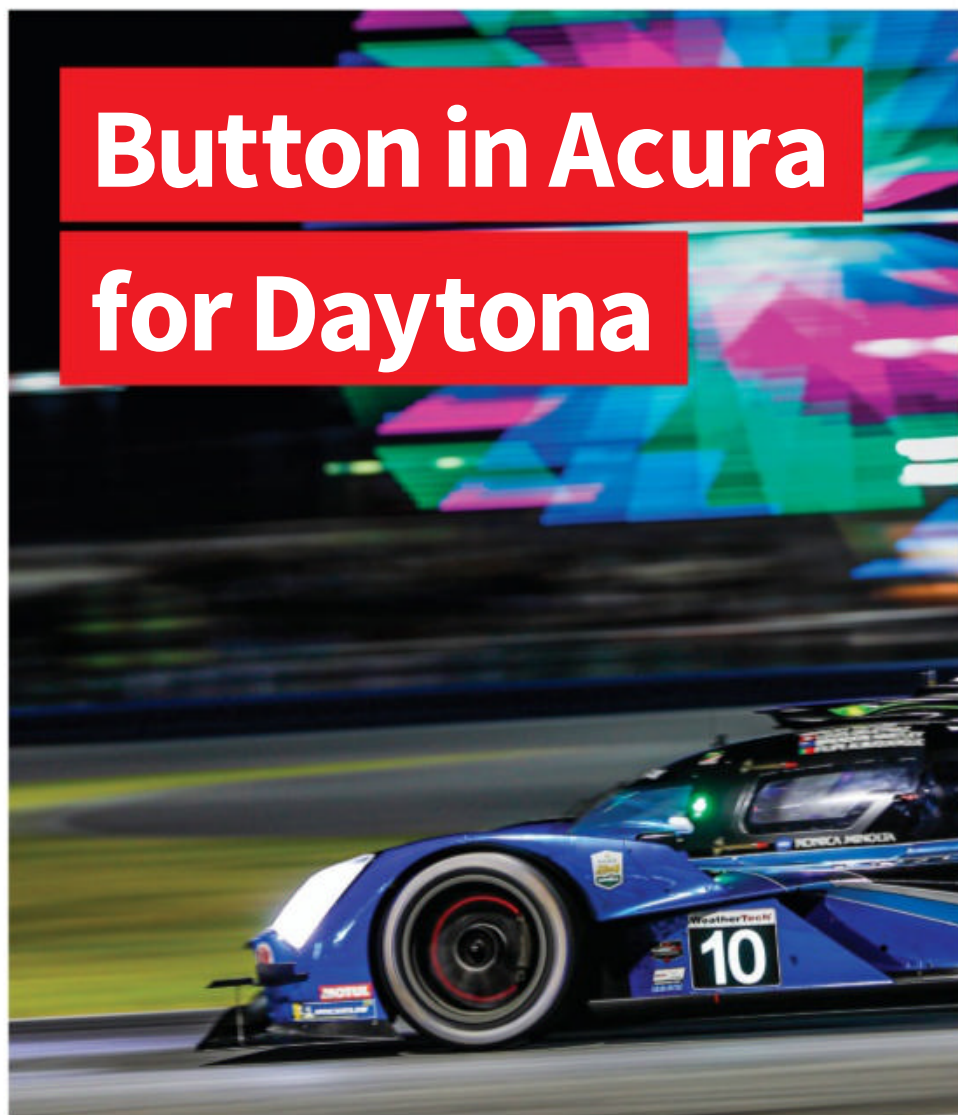
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**DAYTONA 24 HOURS**

Jenson Button will contest the Daytona 24 Hours IMSA SportsCar Championship opener with the WTRAndretti Acura squad in January. It will be the next in a line of sportscar outings for the Formula 1 world champion that have included two Le Mans 24 Hours starts, plus a first IMSA appearance at the Petit Le Mans enduro at Road Atlanta last month.

He will team up in the #40 Acura ARX-06 GTP class contender with full-season drivers Jordan Taylor and Louis Deletraz plus Colton Herta, who will be contesting the long-distance IMSA races. The Briton is one of two star names to have come into

the line-up for Daytona – 2022 Indy 500 winner Marcus Ericsson will share the #10 entry with Ricky Taylor, Filipe Albuquerque and endurance driver Brendon Hartley.

Button has links with WTRAndretti through Jordan Taylor. The younger of the sons of team boss Wayne was part of the Hendrick Motorsports Garage 56 Le Mans programme this year with a reworked Camaro LS1 NASCAR Cup car, acting as driver coach and back-up driver.

“I had my first taste of IMSA last month at Petit Le Mans and loved it,” said Button, who raced JDC-Miller’s Porsche 963 LMDh. “I couldn’t be happier to race at Daytona with such a prestigious team.”

Wayne Taylor, who linked up with

Andretti early this year as part of his plan to expand to two cars, revealed that he had been in contact with Button for three years. “We’ve just never been able to make it happen, but this round we got it to happen,” he explained. “He drove for JDC at Petit and the relationship that he’s built with Jordan from the Garage 56 programme closes the loop on our driver line-ups. Jenson will take the last driver slot that’s open.”

Ex-Formula 1 driver Ericsson joins the line-up after swapping from Chip Ganassi Racing to Andretti Global for his 2024 IndyCar Series campaign. It will be only his second sportscar start after Daytona last year with the Ganassi-run Cadillac team.

**GARY WATKINS**

## Yamamoto clear of back injuries

**SUPER FORMULA/SUPER GT**

Honda star Naoki Yamamoto has left hospital two months on from the violent Super GT crash at Sugo that threatened to end his career. The news raises hopes that the 35-year-old, a two-time champion in Super GT and three-time title winner in Super Formula, will be able to retake his seats in both of Japan’s major series next season.

In the wake of the the Sugo

crash, triggered by contact with the Kondo Racing Nissan GT300 car of Teppei Natori, Yamamoto was diagnosed with an atlantoaxial subluxation – a misalignment of the first and second vertebrae – and damaged spinal cord. But following a successful operation last week, Yamamoto revealed via social media that he had finally been discharged from hospital.

Yamamoto missed the final races of the season, with his

Super Formula Nakajima Racing seat occupied by Hiroki Ohtsu, and his place in the Super GT Team Kunimitsu NSX-GT alongside Tadasuke Makino taken by Honda junior Iori Kimura.

Last weekend, Kimura managed to overhaul Toyota rival Hibiki Taira to win the Super Formula Lights (formerly F3) title at Motegi. Igor Fraga beat Enzo Trulli to fourth and the honour of best westerner.

**JAMIE KLEIN**



ISHIHARA/MOTORSPORT IMAGES





**TCR CHINA** Jack Young missed out on the TCR China title last weekend in a bruising finale in Macau. The Northern Irishman held a six-point lead, but in the first race he picked up a puncture when he was forced into the wall while passing the stalled car of Honda team-mate Andre Couto. Ex-British F3 champion Martin Cao (above) won the race in his Hyundai to move into the series lead. Cao nearly undid all his good work in race two when he tried to pass both Couto and Yang Xiao Wei for third at Lisboa, and took himself and Couto out. Young was caught up in the traffic jam and fell to 12th, recovered to ninth, but went out in another incident. Max Hart went on to take his maiden series victory in his Hyundai, while Cao wrapped up the title despite failing to finish. **Photograph by Macau GP**

## F3 CARS BREAK 200MPH

Three drivers clocked speedtrap figures of over 200mph in last Saturday's qualifying race for the Macau Grand Prix Formula 3 event. Oliver Goethe, Laurens van Hoepen and Sophia Florsch were all clocked at 200.9mph. This was the second appearance in Macau for the current FIA F3 cars, but the first with DRS functioning properly. Luke Browning, who led every lap of both races so never picked up a slipstream or DRS, was over 23mph adrift at 177.5mph. Speeds were generally slower in Sunday's Grand Prix final.

## ARON SET FOR F2 DEBUT

Fresh from jumping out of a burning half an F3 car following his fiery Macau GP shunt, Mercedes F1 protege Paul Aron is to make his Formula 2 debut in this weekend's series finale at Yas Marina. The Estonian, third in the FIA F3 points this season, replaces Clement Novalak at Trident.

## BLOCK IS WILLIAMS JUNIOR

Lia Block, the teenaged daughter of the late Ken, has become a protegee of the Williams Formula 1 team and is to race in the F4-based F1 Academy series next season with ART Grand Prix. The American has a versatile CV, and is best known for her exploits in Extreme E. Meanwhile, Iron Dames prospect Doriane Pin is another set to step into an F4 cockpit. The Frenchwoman, whose focus in 2023 was the LMP2 class of the World Endurance Championship with Prema Racing, will line up with the Italian squad in this weekend's F4 South East Asia round at Sepang.

## BURGESS LEAVES ROLE

Australian Supercars head of motorsport Adrian Burgess is to depart the organisation after five years in the role. The Briton moved to Australia in 2006 and, as Dick Johnson Racing's sporting chief, ran James Courtney to the 2010 crown – eight years after engineering him to the British F3 runner-up spot at Carlin. As the man in charge of Supercars, he oversaw the arrival of the series' Gen3 rules for 2023.

# Customer 963s put on hold

## WEC/IMSA

Porsche has put a hold on the build of further customer 963 LMDhs for the World Endurance Championship and the IMSA SportsCar Championship until next summer. The decision means that there will be five cars racing across the two series in 2024 alongside the four Penske factory entries.

The second 963 for the British Jota team's (right) expanded two-car assault on the 2024 WEC will be the last car completed before production is temporarily halted, the German manufacturer has revealed. Porsche has changed its original plan to make two cars available for each series in both 2023 and 2024, meaning eight cars in total.

Porsche LMDh project boss Urs Kuratle explained that the reasons for the decision are twofold. "We would simply overload



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

our supply chain, that is one thing," he said. "There is a bit of a problem with battery supply [from WAE Technologies], this is not a secret: to have more cars in the field would be a bit of a problem. The second [reason] is that we would overload our system with customer support: we felt mid-season that we have really reached the limit for the support – Porsche wants to give good support to the customers."

Kuratle added that the LMDh project in its entirety "is simply not as far along as we planned".

**GARY WATKINS**

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## Champion Rovanner scales back to part-season for 2024

### WRC

Two-time and reigning World Rally champion Kalle Rovanner is to scale back to a part-time programme with Toyota for 2024. The 23-year-old Finn has penned a new multi-season deal with the Japanese manufacturer, but is set to drive only half the WRC rallies next year alongside co-driver Jonne Halttunen before a return to full-time competition in 2025.

Rovanner started driving rally cars when he was eight years old and rapidly rose up the lower categories before joining the WRC's top flight with Toyota in 2020. The demands of the past few years have prompted the call to scale back his commitments for a season.

"The past few years have been really good and we have been really successful so I'm really happy to continue with the team," said Rovanner. "Next year is going to be a bit different for me and Jonne as we will see a few changes. I have been driving in rallies for a really long time and I just felt that now was a good moment to have a bit of a break to recharge the batteries and have a bit of time off let's say, to have more energy and push for the coming years."

"Of course, I understand that it seems that we are really young and it hasn't been so long for us in the WRC

category. But it takes a lot of time and a lot of energy to do these seasons, so that is definitely the biggest reason. We are going around the world all of the time and, when you are pushing for the championships and for wins all the time, let's say mentally you are in competition mode throughout the season, and it takes a lot of effort and strength to do it."

While Rovanner's WRC schedule is yet to be defined, it is anticipated that he will compete in other motorsport events next year and will continue in drifting. "I think everybody knows I love all kinds of motorsport," he added. "I just hope we will have some fun events in drifting and rallying and what else I don't know yet. It is going to be definitely a different approach next year. I'm really looking forward to be starting in some nice starting positions on the rallies, so I'm sure we are going to enjoy it."

Toyota has also confirmed another part-season for eight-time champion Sebastien Ogier, with Elfyn Evans and Takamoto Katsuta undertaking full campaigns in the GR Yaris in 2024.

Rovanner's fellow Finn Esapekka Lappi is another to have requested a part-campaign for 2024. Hyundai has granted him his wish, and will swap drivers in its third car alongside Thierry Neuville and Ott Tanak.

**TOM HOWARD**

## Westbrook back to IMSA at JDC

### IMSA

Sportscar stalwart Richard Westbrook has left the Ganassi-run Cadillac Racing World Endurance Championship squad to return to JDC-Miller Motorsports in the IMSA SportsCar Championship. The move will put him back at the wheel of a Porsche, a decade and a half after he took his first steps in endurance racing with the German marque.

Westbrook will team up in the JDC-Miller Porsche 963 LMDh for a full-season attack on IMSA's GTP class with Tijmen van der Helm. They will be joined for the long-distance races that make up the Michelin-sponsored IMSA Endurance Cup by Phil Hanson, while two-time WEC GTE Am champion Ben Keating will join them at the season-opening Daytona 24 Hours in January.

The move takes Westbrook back to JDC-Miller after an absence of only one season: he raced its Cadillac DPi-V.R Daytona Prototype international in 2022 (below) before a return to Chip Ganassi Racing, where he had raced for Ford in GT Le Mans in 2016-19. His links with Porsche stretch back to the resumption of his career in its one-make series after a five-year hiatus, and then a short stint as a factory driver after winning back-to-back Supercup titles in 2006-07.

"For 2024, we will have a balance of youth and experience, but more importantly, all our drivers will have extensive prototype experience in IMSA," said team boss John Church. "This driver line-up, coupled with the support of Porsche Motorsports North America, will put us in the position to compete for wins in the IMSA series."

Earl Bamber's continuation in the Cadillac WEC line-up has already been confirmed, while Alex Lynn is known to have a multi-year contract with Ganassi.

**GARY WATKINS**



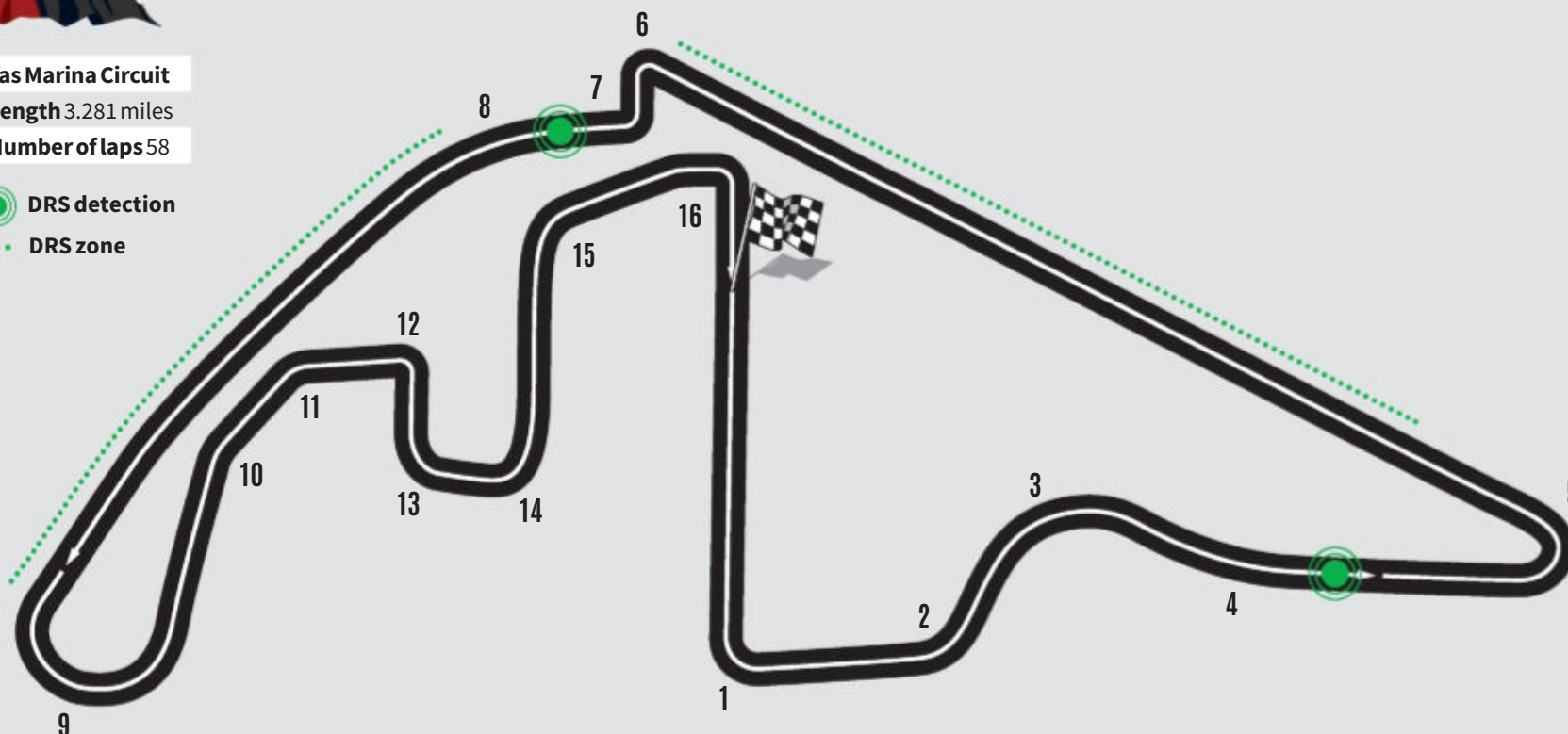


# F1 ABU DHABI GRAND PRIX PREVIEW



**Yas Marina Circuit**  
 Length 3.281 miles  
 Number of laps 58

DRS detection  
 DRS zone



## UK START TIMES

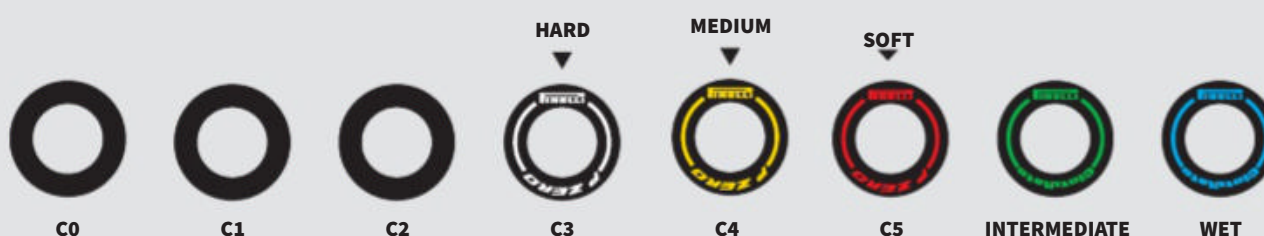
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 FP1 0930 FP2 1300

**Saturday 25 November**  
 FP3 1030  
 QUALIFYING 1400

**Sunday 26 November**  
 RACE 1300

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 SPORTS EXTRA  
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 CHANNEL 4 1730

## TYRE ALLOCATION



## CHAMPIONSHIP POSITIONS

### Drivers

1	<b>Verstappen</b>	549
2	<b>Perez</b>	273
3	<b>Hamilton</b>	232
4	<b>Sainz</b>	200
5	<b>Alonso</b>	200

### Constructors

1	<b>Red Bull</b>	822
2	<b>Mercedes</b>	392
3	<b>Ferrari</b>	388
4	<b>McLaren</b>	284
5	<b>Aston Martin</b>	273



## YAS MARINA STATS

### Previous winners

2022	<b>Max Verstappen</b>	Red Bull
2021	<b>Max Verstappen</b>	Red Bull
2020	<b>Max Verstappen</b>	Red Bull
2019	<b>Lewis Hamilton</b>	Mercedes
2018	<b>Lewis Hamilton</b>	Mercedes
2017	<b>Valtteri Bottas</b>	Mercedes
2016	<b>Lewis Hamilton</b>	Mercedes
2015	<b>Nico Rosberg</b>	Mercedes
2014	<b>Lewis Hamilton</b>	Mercedes
2013	<b>Sebastian Vettel</b>	Red Bull

**2022 POLE POSITION**  
**Max Verstappen**  
 1m23.824s

**POLE LAP RECORD**  
**Max Verstappen**  
 1m22.109s (2021)

**RACE LAP RECORD**  
**Max Verstappen**  
 1m26.103s (2021)



### Laps led

<b>Lewis Hamilton</b>	319
<b>Sebastian Vettel</b>	142
<b>Max Verstappen</b>	113
<b>Valtteri Bottas</b>	61
<b>Nico Rosberg</b>	47
<b>Kimi Raikkonen</b>	36
<b>Daniel Ricciardo</b>	18
<b>Jenson Button</b>	15
<b>Felipe Massa</b>	14
<b>Sergio Perez</b>	6



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# The best and worst of F1 in Vegas

*Now that we know Sin City can deliver a first-rate sporting spectacle, addressing legitimate criticisms of this by-nature glitzy event is the next step*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

**T**he Las Vegas Grand Prix was, really, the best race of the 2023 Formula 1 season so far. And with just the Abu Dhabi finale to go, that mantle is already nailed on. The key ingredients for last Saturday night's engaging contest were these: an exciting track layout that favoured overtaking; controversy from the first-corner clash between Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc; and a multi-team scrap for the first F1 victory in Vegas in 41 years.

The setting was also key. The TV shots of cars running down the Vegas Strip were as spectacular as F1 had hoped, and very much hyped. But to be leaving Las Vegas on such a note stands in stark contrast to the feeling pervading the track at 8.49pm last Thursday. There was then instead a sensation of absolutely stunned silence in the moments following FP1's cancellation.

The event simply got off to an awful start with Ferrari's Carlos Sainz striking the water valve cover dislodged by Alpine's Esteban Ocon a few seconds earlier. Before this, there had already been much griping about the event's 'show'. This was then turbocharged online by Verstappen's "you look like a clown" comment, following his participation in Wednesday night's opening ceremony. But in Vegas of all places, pizzazz is to be expected, surely?

Ultimately, F1 avoided a Spa 1985 situation – a race delayed by more than three months due to the resurfaced track breaking up. Unthinkable today. But there's been a suggestion – embraced by

## “Reports suggest Verstappen got himself into hot water with various F1 stakeholders”

the drivers and many team personnel – that everything associated with the event started far too late in the day (night, really). And that this contributed to much of the tension on the ground on the elongated opening schedule of track action. An earlier start surely would have avoided the need for fans to be kicked out of grandstands and the track overall once the delayed FP2 running was confirmed.

Exhaustion due to the punishing schedule wasn't helped by hotel rooms across the Strip being raided by security staff searching for concealed weapons. This has become common in Vegas in the aftermath of the 2017 Mandalay Bay massacre, and is a logical consideration. Autosport understands that at least two drivers had their suites checked too, although that actually made the whole thing seem more acceptable given the egalitarian

element. But the timetable change should be the most pressing consideration for the things F1 already knows it's going to have to tweak for the return to Vegas in 2024.

Verstappen gained many plaudits for his plain-speaking assessment of the event and the track. But this perhaps wasn't the wisest approach and reports in the Dutch media suggest he got himself into hot water with various F1 stakeholders. This would explain why he rather toed the line post-race, stating: "Today was fun – that's the only thing I want to say about it." Which didn't mean he'd suddenly accepted his new lot as an Elvis impersonator, more that he didn't feel comfortable saying anything else. Wearing that suit and singing *Viva Las Vegas* once he'd crossed the line felt like disingenuous developments given that his Vegas honesty had won over many formerly left cold by his usually opaque facade, previously only really opening up to deride F1's sprint events.

Other messaging around the race should be different too in 2024. Over-hyping from TV commentators and team bosses – more stakeholders who clearly see the financial benefit Liberty Media's efforts have had on their squads' worth – could be toned down. Better ticket and hotel prices are a must for 2024. This might also ease pressure from traditional fans in far off lands feeling left behind by the calendar expanses. F1 now needs to strike a careful balance on costs given the outlay was north of \$500million for the first year alone. But much of the investment won't need repeating.

F1 is very keen to highlight what it claims are the considerable benefits the race has already brought to Vegas. How that all truly improves local people's lives in the coming years is a key question still to be answered. The disruption to the city on the track infrastructure going in – the cause of much anger in Vegas in the months leading up to last weekend – should surely be less in 2024 given F1 has no plans to resurface the roads again.

On the sporting side, F1 still needs to be wary of freak colder temperatures, but in repeat conditions it now knows there isn't to be any multi-safety-car disaster. The track will naturally get rougher and so grippier as it ages. But, clad in his red Elvis suit that made him look more like Leclerc's team-mate, Sergio Perez had an interesting idea in the post-race press conference: "Make Vegas the final race."

With a race contest that good at a destination venue, it's really not a bad thought. European fans have history of enduring early starts for F1 finales, with many sharing fond memories of title showdowns at Suzuka. There would be massive financial implications from the Middle East events currently paying hefty sums for such privileges, but the same logic applies for a Vegas season opener too.

Championship challenges commenced; titanic title tussles clinched. Moments to match the hype. ✨



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# What drove Marquez to Ducati

*The MotoGP legend could have seen out his career in his Honda “comfort zone”, but his will to win meant he couldn’t resist a switch to the best bike on the grid*

LEWIS DUNCAN

“I will always have full respect for Honda. But now my mind is only on coming back to the top with Honda. Then of course if I cannot, because I feel like I don’t have the tools, I will try to find the best for me. And this is something that I already said to them.”

On the eve of the 2022 Valencia Grand Prix, Marc Marquez sat down with Autosport to speak about the season just gone and his hopes of returning to the front of the MotoGP grid now he was fully recovered from his badly broken right arm in 2020.

The above quote (published in the 22-29 December 2022 issue) was his response when asked, should Honda’s ongoing struggles not be resolved, whether he was already looking at his next career move beyond 2024. Shortly before the 2023 Valencia GP this weekend, Marquez once again sat down with Autosport... and is facing his final race with Honda.

Marquez’s decision to join Gresini Racing on a year-old Ducati for 2024 may have come as a shock when first touted in September. But the warning had already been issued to Honda. Despite scoring pole at the opening round in Portugal, the form of the 2023 Honda didn’t suggest it would be a match for MotoGP’s now dominant European marques. Indeed, as we head to the final round of the campaign, the stats make for grim reading: 27 crashes, one GP podium from 19 rounds, an absolute maximum of 12th in the standings possible for 2023.

So, it’s not difficult to see why Marquez made the decision he did, even if it wasn’t easy. The writing was on the wall at the Misano test, though, when the first 2024 Honda prototype failed to produce much in the way of enthusiasm. Honda’s recruitment drive to sign top European engineering talent also ultimately proved unsuccessful.

Marquez says that the smoothness of his exit is “easy to explain”

because “our relationship has always been very honest”, not to mention “very successful”. He described it as a “win-win” – he had a team he loved, and Honda had a rider who could extract the absolute maximum out of a bike that was not the easiest. The fact that he thinks leaving is also a “win-win” decision, because the money Honda saves on paying him can be diverted into the bike, also reveals a lot about how he now views the marque.

Racers are generally ragingly egotistical, but there is sincerity in Marquez’s voice when he talks about Honda’s prospects of returning to the front with or without him. There has also been sincerity when he’s repeatedly stated that his move is purely about having fun again, trying to get rid of doubts in his head about his own performance. While he accepts that the 2020 injuries “changed everything” for him and certainly contributed to Honda’s slide, Marquez was keen to point out that HRC has fielded many top riders alongside him since 2018, and it has been clear since then that the bike wasn’t getting better.

All being well, Marquez will make his public debut on the title-winning 2023-spec Ducati on Tuesday 28 November, two days after what will surely be an emotional final (at least for now) outing with Honda. The expectation is that he will probably top the test and clean up next year, completely destabilise the entire Ducati structure with his dominance on a year-old bike, and celebrate an eighth premier-class world title.

In reality, Marquez knows that staying at Honda would have acted as perfect cover: if the results aren’t great, clearly it’s the bike – look at how the rest of the HRC stable is doing compared to him. By going to the best bike on the grid, there are no excuses.

“Yeah, of course it’s a possibility and of course I have some doubts,” he replies when asked whether he is scared that the move to Ducati won’t work. “Even now that I’ve taken the decision, I have doubts. And it’s a possibility that it doesn’t work. But in the end, when I will retire some day, I will retire quiet because I tried everything in my career. And I did what I feel.

“And if I stayed at Honda and I stayed shy [saying], ‘No, I will not do this because if it’s not successful everybody will push me.’ OK, I accept if it’s not a successful move. I will accept the criticism and I will accept all these things. But at least I will retire in a quiet way because I will try everything. I am like this.

“My comfort zone was to stay in Honda, and 95% of riders would have stayed at Honda. Why? Big salary, no pressure, now I will develop the bike, ‘OK, this race was not good because we are developing the bike.’ [Staying] was easy. But I’m not like this.

“I’m a winner and I’m a killer and I will do my best to try to fight at the top.” ❄



GOLD AND GOOSE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

➔ P46 MOTOGP REPORT



# RACE CENTRE

Ferrari driver knows exactly what could have been had fortune gone in his favour







THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

## FORMULA 1

# “I REALLY BELIEVE THAT THE WIN WAS OURS”

*Charles Leclerc had a real chance to beat Red Bull as F1 returned to Las Vegas. But luck intervened on a rare day Max Verstappen looked beatable to ensure the Dutchman's 18th GP win of 2023*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport  
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**F**errari's Charles Leclerc, sitting alongside winner Max Verstappen in the post-race press conference for Formula 1's returning event in Las Vegas, was clearly buzzing from the adrenalin surges of battling the Red Bulls in a genuine multi-car victory fight for the first time in forever. But under the surface, he knew something much better had slipped through his fingers.

The 2023 Las Vegas Grand Prix ultimately swung on a series of race neutralisation calls. The last was the single biggest element in yet another swashbuckling, wild, thrilling Leclerc defeat.

Ever since Carlos Sainz had secured pole for the Italian GP and battled Verstappen so brilliantly at Monza, it was obvious that Vegas would present Ferrari another opportunity. The 3.9-mile track with its 1.4-mile blast along Las Vegas Boulevard – the Strip – was perfect for the Italian squad to deploy its 'Monza special' flatter rear wing package.

The temperatures here, while far from as cold as feared, still had the paddock's personnel clad in coats and jackets all weekend. And in such conditions, Ferrari's in-race tyre overheating and degradation problem vanishes. "This says a lot about our car," Leclerc would later reflect.

In fact, with the few corners on this new layout slow, >>





It was just inevitable that Verstappen would make an immediate move on Leclerc ...

ASENOV

technical in places, and requiring the kind of kerb-riding the SF-23 likes and Leclerc seems to love, allied with the RB19 hating such track elements, Ferrari's position got stronger still. The Red Bull also lacked the types of corner that help it switch on the front tyres well elsewhere, forcing it to avoid super-low-downforce rear wings to find that energy where it could – at Monza and here too in Vegas.

The low-grip track, with its slippery, bitumen-retaining surface, played a part too. That exacerbates rear tyre sliding, and the cool temperatures also made tyre graining a major factor. So too did the street track setting and otherwise open public roads, plus no support series running, meaning the track evolution factor reset each night.

Leclerc also understands well the importance of careful throttle application running out of slow corners and onto the straights. The balance required is getting good momentum to hit the top speeds fastest, but also not stress the tyres and worsen rear graining. It's a key reason why he's so good in Baku, one of the tracks this venue can be compared to (along with Monaco for its low-grip surface and

Jeddah for high-speed, blind corners). And Ferrari's position, maybe even as the favourite on a combination of pure speed and long-run pace, was further cemented by Sainz securing second ahead of Verstappen in qualifying. The red machines should have locked out the front row, but for the cement around that water valve cover failing on Thursday night.

Then something rather unexpected happened ahead of the race. The classic convertible supposed to carry McLaren's Oscar Piastrini on the drivers' parade left a long streak of oil – soon covered with cement dust and removed as much as possible – right along where Verstappen would start. "Not ideal," Verstappen said of this, but straight as ever. "I had to steer a bit left of it at the start."

As he did so, Verstappen was already gaining on polesitter Leclerc, whose position was made worse by a sudden wheelspin moment in the second phase after the launch. They were near-level when they hit the brakes for the Turn 1 left-hand hairpin, where the race's most controversial moment occurred. Verstappen was



Alonso spins, Bottas connects, Perez ends up having to pit for a new nose

DUNBAR





always going to make a move. Leclerc “gave a bit of margin because I had more to lose and especially with the constructors’ championship fight we have with Mercedes”. Plus, Verstappen’s already secured title success meant he could afford to risk not finishing. The Red Bull was a long way alongside at the apex of Turn 1, but critically wasn’t ahead, despite what Verstappen and his squad would later claim over the airwaves after both had gone off and Verstappen emerged ahead.

“I braked and there was no grip,” he explained after the race. “I didn’t mean to push Charles off the track, but I couldn’t slow it down.”

Verstappen, however, clearly might have applied more steering lock in a manoeuvre the stewards said involved him “appearing to miss the apex of Turn 1” and not “following the racing line”. He was later handed a five-second penalty that he said afterwards was “probably the right call”. In the car, when informed of the stewards’ decision “full of adrenalin” and “not happy with the decision”, Verstappen glibly asked Red Bull to “give them my regards”.

By this point he was 2.2s clear, having scampered to a 1.7s lead by the end of lap one of 50, then again dashed off after the virtual safety car had been activated just before the end of the first tour to allow debris at Turn 1 to be cleared.

There had been quite the melee in the pack behind the leaders, all caused by the low-grip surface and not helped by the oil situation. Fernando Alonso’s solo spin had him tagged by Valtteri Bottas, who in turn was hit by Sergio Perez. Red Bull therefore pitted Perez under the VSC to change his nose and switch him from the medium tyres (Verstappen and Leclerc had also started on this compound) to the hards. This would become critical, with the Mexican rejoining down in 18th, but able to recatch the pack thanks to what happened next.

This was the real variety of safety car soon being called out because, soon after racing resumed at the end of lap two, Lando Norris crashed very hard at Turn 11 on the next tour. The McLaren

## “WHEN INFORMED OF THE STEWARDS’ DECISION, VERSTAPPEN ASKED RED BULL TO ‘GIVE THEM MY REGARDS’”

driver had been following team-mate Piastri through the fast, flowing right/left sequence at this point and was caught on a bump – his car snapped right. Cold, grippless tyres and low pressures from the lower speeds under the VSC neutralisation were also a factor in the crash, which ended when Norris hit the barriers in the run-off far behind Turn 13, having come dangerously close to wiping out Piastri too.

The race resumed on lap seven, and Verstappen set about establishing that 2.2s advantage. Red Bull clearly expected him to be able to extend that and negate his penalty quickly. But that was actually as good as it got. The leaders were lapping in the 1m38s, with Leclerc able to first peg Verstappen’s escape, then chip away at it and reverse any subsequent gains. Eventually, on lap 15, Verstappen’s pace fell to the mid-1m39s and, suddenly, there was a real race for victory happening.

The Dutchman’s tyres were “f\*\*\*\*d”, suffering from his two stints abusing the mediums in trying to break the tow to Leclerc after the virtual and real safety cars. The yellow-walled compound had been vulnerable to graining all through the weekend, although for Red Bull this was surprisingly worse than in FP2, when it had held an advantage over Ferrari.

And so, on lap 16, just as Leclerc was getting DRS for the long blast along the Strip – the zone lengthened by 50 metres after Thursday/Friday night practice to improve the overtaking potential – Red Bull called Verstappen in. >>



By the time he pitted, Verstappen was second on the road again – Leclerc had retaken the lead at Turn 14 and the corner leading off the Strip by the Planet Hollywood complex, where apparently ticketless fans would later tear down view-blocking screens. Now Ferrari could use what team boss Fred Vasseur said was “better tyre management” on the mediums. It left Leclerc out for five more laps, gaining a significant tyre-life offset to his rival, who had rejoined 11th and behind even George Russell. The Mercedes had briefly been able to stay with the leaders while running third early on before falling back along with Alpine’s qualifying star, Pierre Gasly. Russell had come in on lap 15 and (like Verstappen) taken hards. Leclerc got these on the 21st tour, which boosted Perez to the net lead.

Perez had battled past Lance Stroll, Daniel Ricciardo and Zhou Guanyu after the safety car restart, with strong pace in the low 1m38s in free air once the leaders had pitted. The Red Bull, said team boss Christian Horner, just “came alive” on what Verstappen called “a bit more robust” product “against the graining” in the white-walled compound. But Perez still faced a 49-lap stint to the end if nothing else happened to create another cheap pitstop.

Leclerc’s early tours on the hards were not setting the timing screens alight. But this was because he was working “to bring them

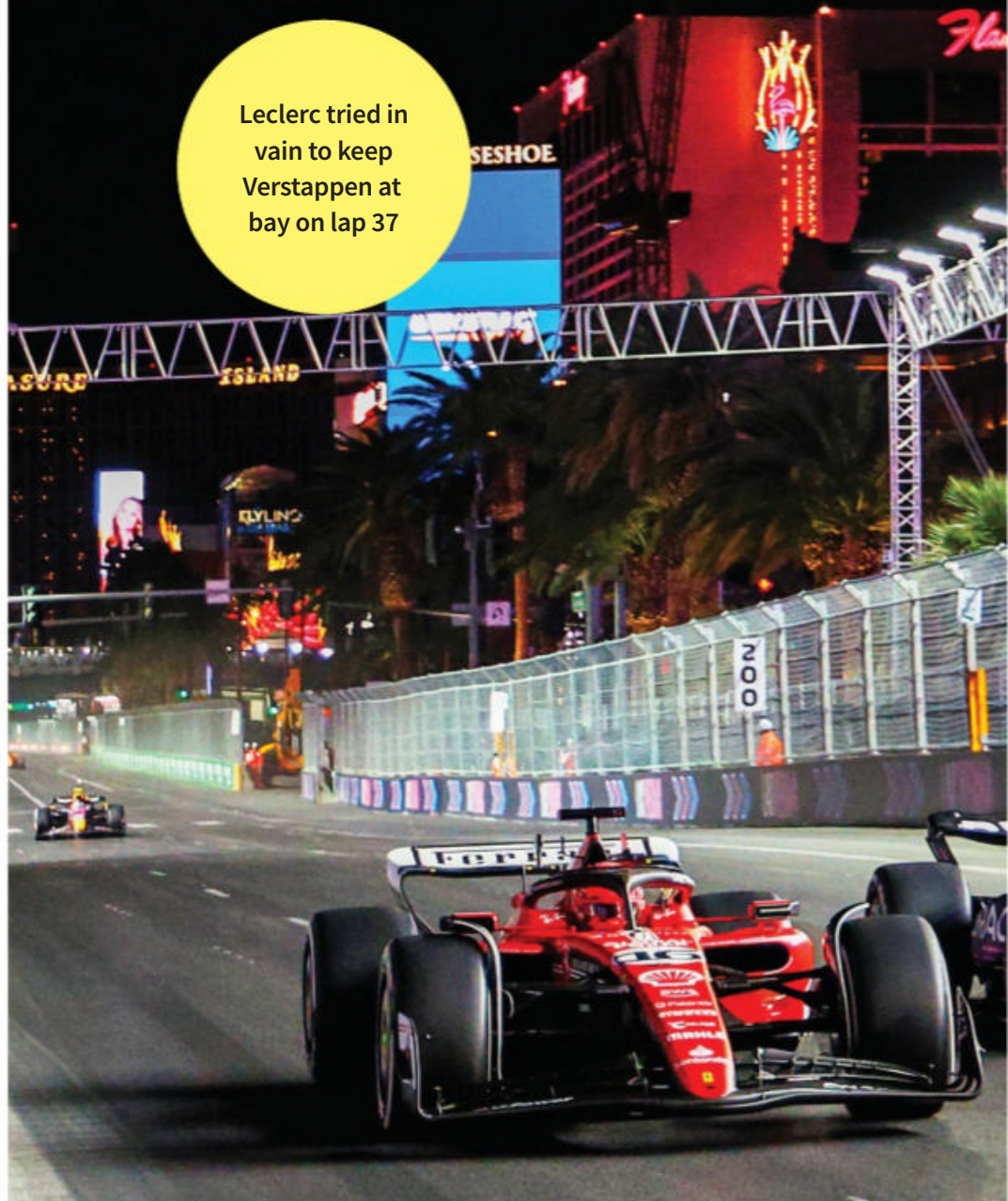
## “WHEN YOU COOL THEM DOWN DURING THE SAFETY CAR, TO RESTART A USED TYRE IS INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT”

into temperature and we had done a really good job on that”. This is why Leclerc ended up feeling “really confident that the win was ours” at this stage.

The hard rubber needed such careful treatment because “you had to push harder to generate the heat into the tyre”, according to Pirelli motorsport boss Mario Isola. But overdoing it would risk the rear-tyre graining that everyone was fearing, and was worse all weekend on the mediums.

Verstappen, meanwhile, was racing hard against Zhou and Alonso, recovering to run with Russell on lap 23. At this stage Leclerc had finally started pressing on to the low 1m38s, and on lap 25 he passed VSC-stopper Stroll, then faced an 11.4s gap to Perez.

Verstappen’s lap 20 pass on Zhou had shown a hint of what the RB19 could do through the long Turns 10-11 swoops that most other cars could not. This was to be so quick that Turn 12 then became a legitimate overtaking spot, with the long Strip DRS run still to come. On lap 25, Verstappen’s run to here was again so good that he moved to attack Russell into Turn 12. But the Mercedes driver “totally didn’t



Leclerc tried in vain to keep Verstappen at bay on lap 37

see him in the blindspot” and turned in – hard. The contact smashed Verstappen’s front-wing right-side endplate, but did little real damage to Russell’s W14, bar breaking its left-front wheel cover. But it again left debris strewn across the track, causing another safety car.

Russell was handed a 5s penalty for causing the crash. The Briton would go on to battle past others who didn’t stop under this second safety car period, ultimately recovering to finish fourth on the road but dropping to eighth when his penalty was applied.

But there was much still to come before that, starting with Red Bull pulling Perez and Verstappen in during the safety car period to bank more gifted race time. For Perez, this likely meant he avoided having Leclerc “coming back” with his strong hard-tyre pace, as Vasseur put it. Horner refused to say whether Perez would have needed a second stop, saying only “it was a voyage into the unknown, just keep going until you need to stop”.

Ferrari, despite easily having time to pull Leclerc in, left him out. This was “the timing of the safety car [being] the



Russell penalised for causing contact that cost Verstappen wing endplate

GRANT





TILTON/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

worst-case scenario for us”, according to Vasseur.

So, the order when the safety car peeled in for the start of lap 29 was Leclerc, Perez, Piastri, Gasly and Verstappen – the McLaren and Alpine also boosted forwards by not taking the option of stopping under this caution period.

Leclerc did well to drop Perez by hitting the gas out of Turn 14, where he'd earlier been annoyed that Verstappen had led the first restart from before that corner and so braked hard again. This gave Leclerc a handy 0.8s advantage, which was 1.5s by Turn 5. But this wasn't the DRS-proof advantage it seemed because of the challenge of warming up the hard tyres. “The problem is that then when you cool them down during the safety car, to restart a used tyre is incredibly difficult and there we lost the race,” Leclerc explained. “I think we did the best job we could restarting the hard. I slid quite a bit and that's not great.”

Isola explained that the hard tyre challenge here was that, without a fresh set, “you struggle to put the energy into the tyre to generate the heat because you have less rubber”. Plus, the length of the Strip straight and cool conditions meant the front tyres were losing up to 40C and the rears 25C, even at full racing speeds.

All this meant Perez, with hard tyres five laps younger, was in DRS range as soon as it was reactivated on the 31st tour. Here Leclerc was able to stay ahead using his very low-downforce wing package, with Perez still on the bigger of the two Red Bull options tried in practice. But the next time by, Perez seized the lead with a DRS run to Turn 14 that ended with him getting it done on the brakes on the inside line.

But Leclerc didn't give up. He stuck with Perez so well that he was able to use his top-speed prowess (he topped the race speed trap at 217mph) to repass at the same point three laps later.

By this time Verstappen had dispatched Gasly and Piastri and was again a victory contender just behind. He asked Red Bull to consider they “work together”, then passed his team-mate anyway – at Turn 14 on lap 36. The next time around he got Leclerc at the same spot. The Ferrari driver came off the brakes to try to make a fight of it at the apex, but Verstappen was in the right spot to negate this.

Engineer Gianpiero Lambiase urged Verstappen to push to break the tow, with Leclerc still lurking and getting DRS to aid his defence against Perez in turn. Verstappen did this with a pace increase to the 1m35s, a time Leclerc couldn't achieve until near the finish.

Then, on lap 43 with Verstappen 1.9s ahead, Leclerc locked up at >>

## QUALIFYING



DUNBAR

Qualifying in Las Vegas had all of Charles Leclerc's greatest hits. Stunning speed, the odd mistake, brutal self-assessment. In the end, though, the Ferrari driver was dominant.

He'd led Q1 and Q2 convincingly, but Q3 was a rather different challenge. The opening segments had featured the drivers doing multiple laps to build temperature on the cool, slippery track surface, which was gripping up significantly as what was only the second live session of the day went on. The leaders were traversing the first two parts across both fresh and used soft tyres, which for Ferrari left them with two new sets for the finale. This had been building to a crescendo – particularly with last-gasp improvements down the order in Q1 and Q2 suggesting track position (to be last to start the final fliers) would be pivotal. Leclerc had also produced what he called “probably the best laps I've done in a while” on his way to topping Q2 with a 1m32.775s.

On the first runs in Q3, it became clear that, unlike the previous segments, the leaders were going to try just one warm-up lap and flier. This felt surprising, but Pirelli motorsport boss Mario Isola explained that while “grip recovery was there [on multi-lap runs], the track evolution was more important and the new tyre was giving extra grip in any case”. Leclerc again led the way, but with a time slower than his Q2 best – a 1m33.021s. Still, though, he headed team-mate Carlos Sainz by 0.022 seconds (he'd been 0.234s ahead in Q1 and 0.563s in Q2), with Max Verstappen just 0.083s further back. The stage was poised for a thrilling climax. But in the end, it all deflated somewhat.

Sainz attempted two warm-up tours, which left Leclerc running first of the leaders. Leclerc “didn't put things together”, but nevertheless still produced an improvement to the session's best: 1m32.726s. Leclerc's kerb-riding at Turn 8 – he enjoyed “trying to hook your wheel inside the kerb” – led to a quicker exit than Sainz, with his smoother entrance to Turn 7 and the Turn 9 exit also pivotal.

Behind, Verstappen was trying a second attempt on the same set of Q3 softs, but he abandoned this because he was 0.6s down after two sectors with what he called “chewing gum grip”. And while Sainz “felt like I did a good step”, he still ended up just 0.044s adrift. With a drop to 12th thanks to his “upsetting” grid penalty, it summed up his luckless weekend. Leclerc explained that his second, pole-winning Q3 effort was “a cleaner lap” than his first.

Behind came George Russell and Pierre Gasly, with Alex Albon and Logan Sargeant sixth and seventh fastest. Lewis Hamilton and Sergio Perez were shock Q2 fallers.

**“The stage was poised for a thrilling climax. But in the end, it all deflated somewhat”**



TRACKSIDE VIEW



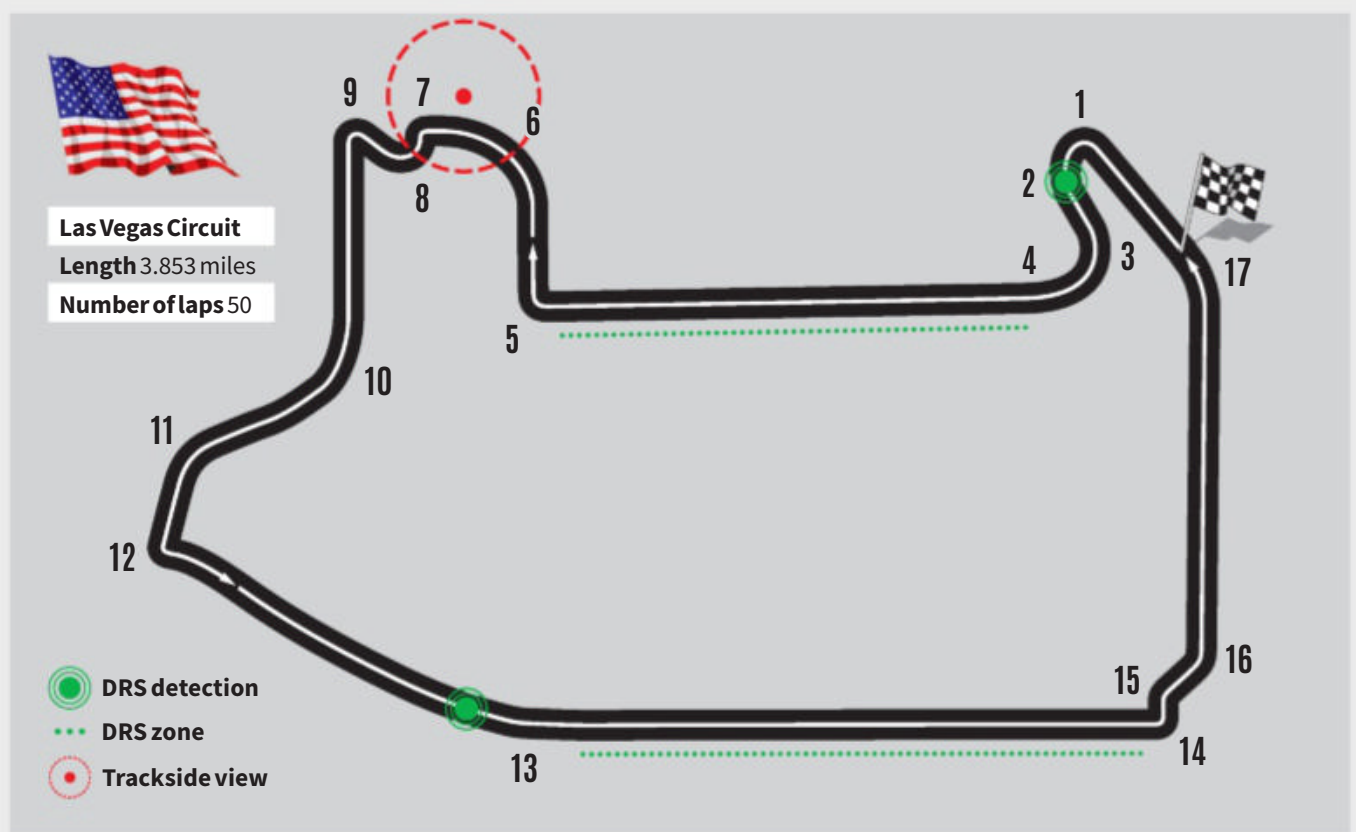
PICS: ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Formula 1 *really* doesn't help itself at times. No, not the track breaking up in FP1. No, not the fans being booted out ahead of the delayed FP2. No, not the lack of an apology for the shambolic opening day. They are all bad – much worse, in fact – than what happens at the start of FP3. But it's just typical. The clock finally ticks down to 8.30pm local time... and no cars leave the pits.

It isn't long before the McLaren pair are circulating. But a queue of drivers eager to get going wouldn't go amiss. No wonder the crowd to Autosport's back on the outside of Turn 7 cheers Oscar Piastri's arrival heartily. It's a mixture of ironic welcoming and escaping frustration turning to joy. Finally, the fans are getting what they've paid for. In some cases, paid \$50,000 for.

Autosport had also been here during the abandoned FP1 session. We were aghast at the news that the session wouldn't be resumed. Adding to the shock had been the circuit commentators informing the fans that they had no idea why the decision had been made, before news of Carlos Sainz's strike of the water valve cover had really filtered out. Then, the reaction was stunned silence.

Now, every driver is getting a cheer first time by – even Sergio Perez and Max Verstappen when they join the FP3 fray later than



**“Finally, the fans are getting what they've paid for. In some cases, paid \$50,000 for”**

most. But there is little in the way of the many thrills and spills we initially saw in the truncated Thursday night running.

Valtteri Bottas changes all that. In response to his C43 understeering too much in the rescheduled FP2, Alfa Romeo has adjusted its set-up for Friday night. And yet Bottas is almost backing it

in each time around here – our location lit up surreally by the Finn's own face at one stage, beamed down upon us from the gigantic LED screen of the Sphere entertainment venue. Twice Bottas locks up through Turn 7 and cuts Turn 8 – cooked rubber wafting through the chilled night air. He's actually on cooldown laps each time, demonstrating the fragile tyre temperature challenge here and how on edge the Alfa now is, after he'd been fifth overall in FP2.

There are a variety of lines. These include Ferrari's Charles

Leclerc clonking the inside Turn 7 kerbs way more than team-mate Sainz, while Lewis Hamilton makes an adjustment from sweeping in later and wider early on, as his Mercedes team-mate George Russell does throughout, to later mimicking Leclerc's approach.

Soon the mistakes are piling up – this spot is tricky because the drivers still have to complete the end of the long Turn 6 left as they start braking for Turn 7. Good thing that this is the 'Capital of Second Chances'. How F1 might need one of those here in 2024...

**ALEX KALINAUCKAS**





A night out in Las Vegas: Leclerc, Verstappen and Perez under the lights

FERRARO

Turn 12 and went deep, which handed Perez second. But even on the day when Perez finally sealed second in the 2023 drivers' standings, he couldn't give Red Bull a 1-2. This was because, while Verstappen moved clear to a lead of 4.5s by the end of lap 47, Leclerc had by then erased the 1.5s deficit he faced after his off.

Red Bull was sufficiently concerned about Leclerc's close presence to Perez that it asked Verstappen to back off to a 2.5s gap so that he could aid the Mexican with a long-range tow. Verstappen obliged, but it made little difference. This was because Leclerc had spotted Perez making "a small mistake [a left-front lock-up at Turn 14 on lap 44] four or five laps before [the last lap], so I knew he was being cautious a little bit on braking". Having charged his electrical energy for one last effort, which turned out to be his personal best lap time on the final tour, Leclerc went for it at Turn 14.

He made a late lunge to the inside, and Perez turned out of a harder fight. Leclerc then covered off any hint of an audacious last-corner repass by sticking to the inside and hanging on to beat Perez by just 0.2s, Verstappen having already taken the chequered flag 2.1s ahead.

There can be little doubt that Leclerc had been denied a genuine victory shot by the final safety car. As Isola noted, "it was working quite well", the hard was the tyre to race on longest. It had some graining, but Isola said this was "not affecting the performance", especially compared to the medium. Perez's misfortune on lap one

## "THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT LECLERC HAD BEEN DENIED A GENUINE VICTORY SHOT BY THE FINAL SAFETY CAR"

put him on that rubber effectively from the off and, while he did make several fine passes in the pack, the race circumstances did the rest. Verstappen was also able to press into the 1m36s and quicker on the hards soon after the final restart. That's even with his damaged front wing, of which Horner noted: "Thankfully it wasn't a massive [balance] shift."

But, critically, Verstappen had also switched to what he called Red Bull's closest version of a "fantastic low downforce wing" ahead of qualifying. He felt that taking "a little bit of time to get into a nicer rhythm" with this hurt his performance on Friday night. In the race, it made him "quick on the straight" compared to Perez, but it was also then "a little bit more loose in the corners".

This exacerbated his medium tyres graining when leading early, but on the hards this was less of a problem because they were more durable, and so Verstappen "could really push on the tyres" at a low-degradation venue. That clearly boosted Ferrari, which was left to reflect on so many cases of what might have been.

Leclerc explained in the press conference that "now, [with hindsight's benefit] I would have stopped" under the second safety car. Had he done so he would have sacrificed track position to Perez, but clearly would have been able to pass in a straight fight, given he got the Red Bull that at the time had the best chance to win.

The safety car also aided Verstappen, with Isola reckoning that making the finish on his first set of hards would have meant "he would have suffered more tyre degradation". This increases the case that Perez was on a two-stopper before Russell hit Verstappen, given his first hards were already 25 laps old.

Leclerc never really got to show what he could do in clean air on the hard tyres he'd worked so well to bring in. ❄️



Though Perez lost second place in the GP, he cemented runner-up status in the points

DUNBAR

**NEXT F1 REPORT**  
Abu Dhabi GP  
30 November  
issue





MAUGER

## MIXED FORTUNES FOR ALPINES IN LAS VEGAS

Esteban Ocon clinched his best F1 result since his Monaco podium, snaring fourth place in Las Vegas in an impressive showing.

Ocon appeared to defy an instruction from his Alpine team not to pass team-mate Pierre Gasly on lap 34, but it very much proved to be the right call; Gasly fell down the order with tyre graining and battery issues over the race's second half. Ocon had produced a series of strong moves to rise from his lowly 16th-place grid berth, and was up to eighth by the end of the first lap after escaping the chaos ahead.

Although Kevin Magnussen got back ahead after the early safety car, Ocon got past the Dane once again and then put a brave move on Logan Sargeant at Turns 6/7 to continue his progression through the order.

After clearing Gasly, Ocon was shuffled down to fifth on the road by George Russell, but the Briton's penalty put him back in eighth amid a closely congested order and reinstated Ocon's fourth-place finish.

Gasly had qualified fourth and ran as high as third after the mid-race safety car, but slipped out of the points and finished 11th. He had continued to struggle with getting heat into the tyres over the course of the race.



DUNBAR



GALLOWAY

## Neon Sainz doesn't light up Strip

Carlos Sainz labelled his efforts in Las Vegas as "a good comeback and damage limitation" after the Ferrari star was demoted to 12th on the grid following power unit penalties in the wake of his water valve cover incident in FP1.

Sainz's Turn 1 spin on cold tyres after tagging Lewis Hamilton on the opening lap made the recovery effort that much more difficult overall. Sainz reckoned that "he'd touched the brake, not even hit it, and the tyres were locked", and likened the opening corner to "driving on ice".

Pitting early under the safety car undid much of the first-lap damage, and Sainz was in the ascendancy as others began to make their visits to the pitlane. That progress topped out while running fourth. George Russell stole a slipstream to pass on lap 24, and Sainz was notably mugged by Max Verstappen as soon as Russell had

completed the move when the Red Bull found great speed on the back stretch.

Sainz had won out in a battle with Fernando Alonso early on, as each recovered from similarly wayward incidents on lap one, and the Spanish pair resumed their scrap for position after the second safety car. But Sainz won out a second time, while Hamilton managed to nestle between them to demote Alonso to a net ninth.

Sainz was left to rue what could have been en route to sixth place. "You saw today what happened out front and the pace Charles had," he said. "With two Ferraris up there we could have had a very good, fun race for the podium and for the win. We missed out a bit on that but it was a good day for the team in terms of constructors' - we managed but it should have been even better."

# 20

The number of grand prix wins for Red Bull in 2023, a new Formula 1 record for most victories by one team in a single season.



THOMPSON/GETTY IMAGES/RED BULL CONTENT POOL





## Norris hospitalised after heavy lap-three shunt

Lando Norris had to visit hospital following his bump-induced accident on lap three, but was discharged after a quick check-up. This left McLaren's fortunes on the shoulders of Oscar Piastri, who produced an impressive run to 10th place to turn around a dismal qualifying performance

for the Woking squad.

Piastri managed to overcome a clash with Lewis Hamilton to soar into the upper reaches of the points, but the decision to start on the hard tyres had hurt the Australian, and progress throughout the race was stunted by the need to stop

again for medium rubber.

A late push resulted in fastest lap and a pass on Pierre Gasly to get into the top 10. "It's a shame [to only finish 10th] as Oscar was absolutely brilliant," said McLaren boss Andrea Stella. "Today was a bit of a surprise as to how quick we were."

### Q&A

#### LEWIS HAMILTON MERCEDES DRIVER

**Did you think seventh place at the finish was on the cards when you got the puncture?**

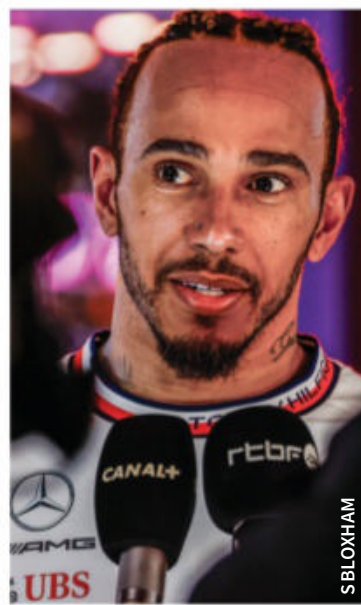
I had no idea what would be possible, but I'm grateful to get a couple of points at least. But would have been a podium, for sure.

**How did you find the circuit?**

The race was great. It was one of the best races. And everyone had been... so many people, all the media, everyone been so negative about this race and about the show and all that, I was [like] just let it be and let's see how it goes. Great race! This is like Baku, but better.

**Do you think F1 did a great job at balancing the entertainment factor along with the actual racing on track?**

I don't know anything about the entertainment stuff. So I wasn't watching that. But I think Vegas brought on a great event. And next year is going to be even better. Now, we've gone through it once. There'll be



loads of learning and yeah, really grateful for Vegas for having us.

**Entertaining race from the outside as well.**

**How big a win do you think it is for F1?**

I think, as I said, there's just been a lot of negativity about having three grands prix in the States and people talking about bringing back old classic races from Europe, but this has provided a better race than most of the tracks we go to. So hats off to the people that run the show, and I can't wait to come back and hopefully have a better race here next year.

## STROLL'S PITSTOP GAMBLES PAY OFF WITH FIFTH-PLACE FINISH

Lance Stroll matched his Brazilian Grand Prix result with a second successive fifth place, the Aston Martin driver making up 10 positions at the start to avoid the chaos ahead.

Stroll took the opportunity to pit during the early safety car at the cost of five of those 10 positions, but moved through the order when others took their scheduled visits to the pitlane later on.

He pitted again when the second safety car emerged to accept a similarly cheap stop, although a slightly slow tyre change cost him a place to Max Verstappen, and he was jumped by Alex Albon on the restart, but Stroll regrouped and fought his way back up to

fifth. He was overtaken late on by George Russell, but got fifth back when the Mercedes driver was handed a five-second penalty for clashing with Verstappen.

Fernando Alonso's day was less auspicious after overcooking it at the first corner, where he spun into the run-off at the start to set up contact with Valtteri Bottas.

Alonso had to recover from a first-lap pitstop and, like Stroll, used the second safety car to mitigate the damage of a second stop. This put him in what seemed like a race-long fight with Carlos Sainz, who eventually broke clear of their battle; in the meantime, Alonso lost a place to Lewis Hamilton to finish ninth.







# CONGRATULATIONS ON A HYPERHYPER FANTASTIC 2023 SEASON



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# DRAWING BOARD

GIORGIO PIOLA

## RED BULL'S SPLIT APPROACH TO VEGAS CHALLENGE...

Unfamiliar conditions made car set-up for the Las Vegas Grand Prix something of a head-scratcher among the teams. Formula 1 very seldom runs on 18C track temperatures, and mitigating the effect of tyre graining was going to be one problem. But the nature of the course, which features a 1.4km (0.9-mile) flat-out stretch along the Las Vegas Strip, meant that running skinny wings was going to be a preferable solution to hit top speed.

With less downforce, building up tyre temperature throughout the Pirelli construction was going to be slightly difficult, which was why graining was so prevalent. Red Bull split its two cars and opted to give

Sergio Perez a slightly higher-downforce rear wing, giving him an advantage in traction and through the corners, but costing a little bit of outright speed down the straight. When attacking with DRS, this did not affect him too much, but in defence it proved to be one of the key reasons why he lost second to Charles Leclerc at the death.

Max Verstappen's rear wing was more trimmed out, making it more difficult to build tyre temperature early on, but a Gurney flap at least helped to balance the downforce levels out slightly.

**JAKE BOXALL-LEGG**

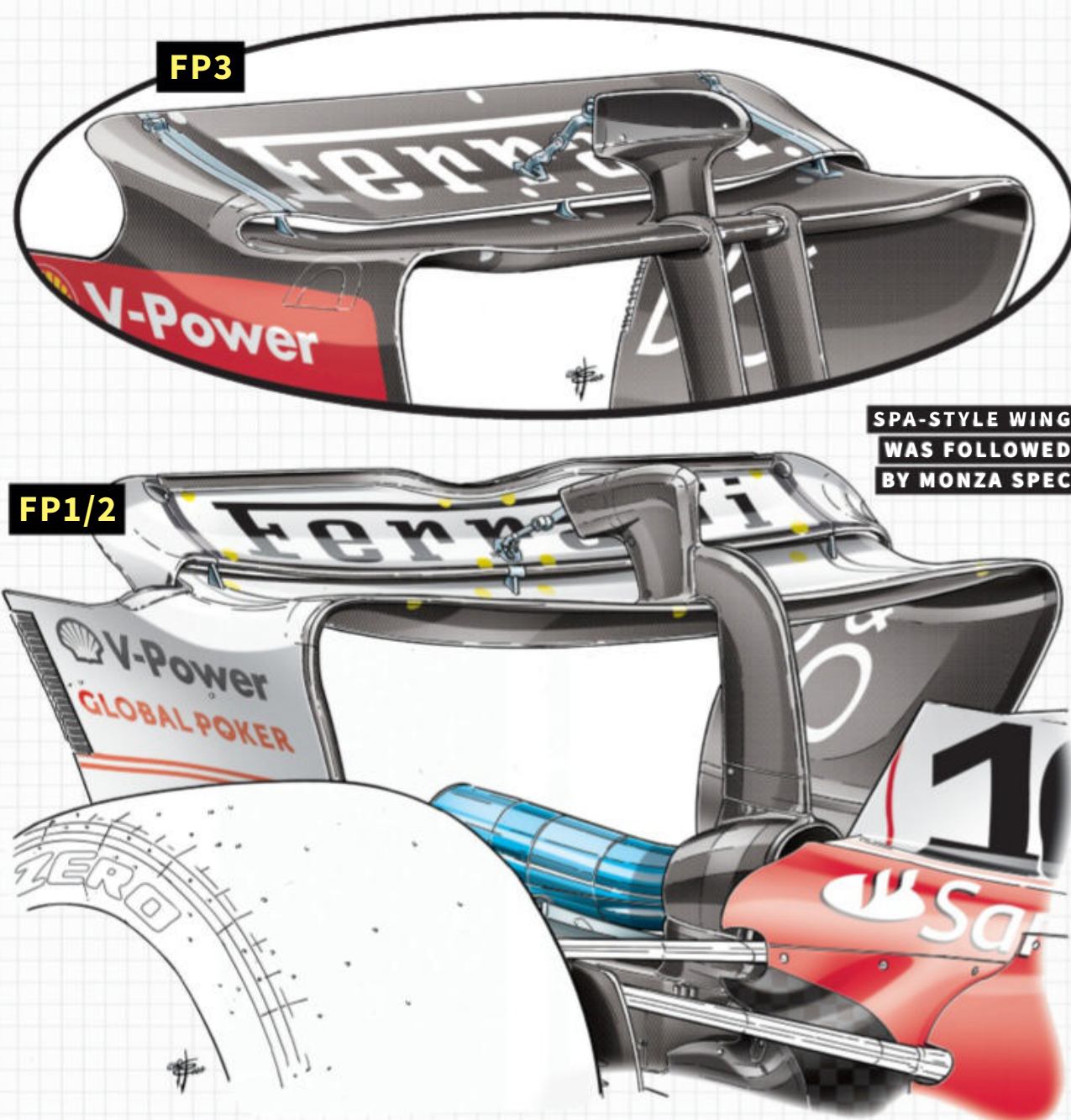


## ...AS FERRARI GOES SKINNY AGAIN

Ferrari also took the opportunity to test its wing levels out, and started with a specification used at the Belgian Grand Prix featuring a slightly curved mainplane and a small dip in the top plane's trailing edge. But it seemed that the team felt this was not delivering the straightline speed required on the Vegas strip, and changed to a wing used at Monza with a top plane featuring a distinctly low angle of attack.

The team was perhaps more confident in doing this since it is sometimes prone to overheating its tyres during the hotter races, so it would stand to reason that it could get the right fire-up in colder conditions. Leclerc ended up being fastest in the speed trap during the race at 350km/h (217mph), 6.2km/h faster than the next-best recorded speed from George Russell, which helped him mount his last-gasp effort on Perez for second.

**JAKE BOXALL-LEGG**







**FREE PRACTICE 1**

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m40.909s
2	Hulkenberg	1m43.446s
3	Magnussen	1m44.261s
4	Verstappen	1m44.397s
5	Ocon	1m45.365s
6	Russell	1m45.497s
7	Sainz	1m45.824s
8	Tsunoda	1m45.908s
9	Perez	1m46.793s
10	Bottas	1m47.147s
11	Gasly	1m48.253s
12	Hamilton	1m48.513s
13	Ricciardo	1m48.650s
14	Zhou	1m48.822s
15	Norris	1m48.947s
16	Stroll	no time
17	Piastri	no time
18	Albon	no time
19	Alonso	no time
20	Sargeant	no time

WEATHER Night, air 17C track 20C

**FREE PRACTICE 2**

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m35.265s
2	Sainz	1m35.782s
3	Alonso	1m35.793s
4	Perez	1m36.085s
5	Bottas	1m36.129s
6	Verstappen	1m36.183s
7	Hulkenberg	1m36.489s
8	Stroll	1m36.496s
9	Hamilton	1m36.663s
10	Albon	1m36.688s
11	Norris	1m36.864s
12	Russell	1m36.890s
13	Magnussen	1m36.917s
14	Piastri	1m36.987s
15	Gasly	1m37.134s
16	Ocon	1m37.241s
17	Tsunoda	1m37.412s
18	Zhou	1m37.656s
19	Ricciardo	1m37.680s
20	Sargeant	1m38.140s

WEATHER Night, air 13-14C track 16C

**FREE PRACTICE 3**

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Russell	1m34.093s
2	Piastri	1m34.491s
3	Sargeant	1m34.645s
4	Verstappen	1m34.653s
5	Perez	1m34.706s
6	Albon	1m34.726s
7	Alonso	1m34.788s
8	Hamilton	1m34.853s
9	Bottas	1m34.908s
10	Magnussen	1m35.067s
11	Norris	1m35.089s
12	Hulkenberg	1m35.112s
13	Stroll	1m35.253s
14	Ocon	1m35.297s
15	Zhou	1m35.881s
16	Leclerc	1m35.908s
17	Sainz	1m35.939s
18	Tsunoda	1m36.087s
19	Gasly	1m36.485s
20	Ricciardo	1m37.778s

WEATHER Night, air 17-18C track 19-20C

**SEASON STATS**

DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS	BEST FINISH	BEST QUAL
1 Verstappen	549	1	1
2 Perez	273	1	1
3 Hamilton	232	2	1
4 Sainz	200	1	1
5 Alonso	200	2	2
6 Norris	195	2	2
7 Leclerc	188	2	1
8 Russell	160	3	2
9 Piastri	89	2	2
10 Stroll	73	4	3
11 Gasly	62	3	4
12 Ocon	58	3	4
13 Albon	27	7	4
14 Tsunoda	13	8	8
15 Bottas	10	8	7
16 Hulkenberg	9	7	2
17 Ricciardo	6	7	4
18 Zhou	6	9	5
19 Magnussen	3	10	4
20 Lawson	2	9	10
21 Sargeant	1	10	7
22 deVries	0	12	12

**CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP**

CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP	PTS
1 Red Bull	822
2 Mercedes	392
3 Ferrari	388
4 McLaren	284
5 Aston Martin	273
6 Alpine	120
7 Williams	28
8 AlphaTauri	21
9 Alfa Romeo	16
10 Haas	12

**QUALIFYING BATTLE**

Verstappen	19	1	Perez
Leclerc	14	7	Sainz
Hamilton	11	10	Russell
Gasly	13	8	Ocon
Norris	15	6	Piastri
Zhou	7	14	Bottas
Alonso	18	3	Stroll
Magnussen	7	14	Hulkenberg
Ricciardo	2	3	Tsunoda
Tsunoda	4	1	Lawson
deVries	2	8	Tsunoda
Sargeant	0	21	Albon

**WINS**

Verstappen	18
Perez	2
Sainz	1

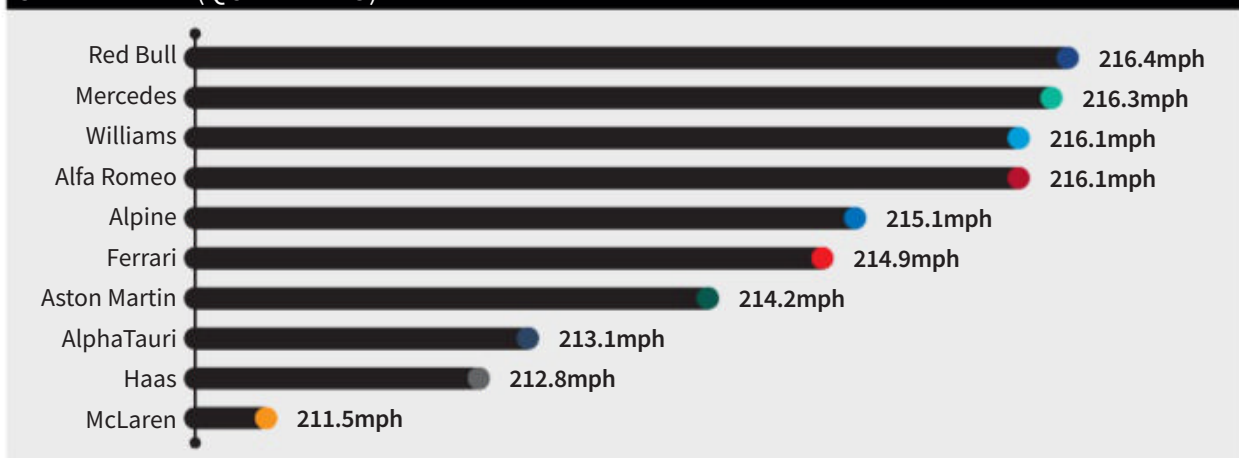
**FASTEST LAPS**

Verstappen	8
Hamilton	4
Perez	2
Piastri	2
Alonso	1
Norris	1
Russell	1
Tsunoda	1
Zhou	1

**POLE POSITIONS**

Verstappen	11
Leclerc	5
Perez	2
Sainz	2
Hamilton	1

**SPEED TRAP (QUALIFYING)**



**QUALIFYING 1**

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m33.617s
2	Sainz	1m33.851s
3	Russell	1m34.137s
4	Verstappen	1m34.190s
5	Hulkenberg	1m34.265s
6	Gasly	1m34.272s
7	Bottas	1m34.305s
8	Hamilton	1m34.307s
9	Magnussen	1m34.337s
10	Alonso	1m34.422s
11	Stroll	1m34.504s
12	Sargeant	1m34.525s
13	Perez	1m34.574s
14	Albon	1m34.634s
15	Ricciardo	1m34.683s
16	Norris	1m34.703s
17	Ocon	1m34.834s
18	Zhou	1m34.849s
19	Piastri	1m34.850s
20	Tsunoda	1m36.447s

**QUALIFYING 2**

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m32.775s
2	Sainz	1m33.338s
3	Russell	1m33.351s
4	Gasly	1m33.494s
5	Verstappen	1m33.572s
6	Albon	1m33.588s
7	Alonso	1m33.617s
8	Magnussen	1m33.664s
9	Sargeant	1m33.733s
10	Bottas	1m33.809s
11	Hamilton	1m33.837s
12	Perez	1m33.855s
13	Hulkenberg	1m33.979s
14	Stroll	1m34.199s
15	Ricciardo	1m34.308s

**QUALIFYING 3**

POS	DRIVER	TIME
1	Leclerc	1m32.726s
2	Sainz	1m32.770s
3	Verstappen	1m33.104s
4	Russell	1m33.112s
5	Gasly	1m33.239s
6	Albon	1m33.323s
7	Sargeant	1m33.513s
8	Bottas	1m33.525s
9	Magnussen	1m33.537s
10	Alonso	1m33.555s

WEATHER Night, air 15C track 18C





**STARTING GRID**



**RESULTS ROUND 21/22 (50 LAPS - 192.60 MILES)**

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	FINISHTIME	LED	TYRES
1	Max Verstappen (NLD)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	1h29m08.289s	29	Mn, Hn, Hn
2	Charles Leclerc (MCO)	Ferrari	+2.070s	13	Mn, Hn
3	Sergio Perez (MEX)	Red Bull-Honda RBPT	+2.241s	8	Mn, Hn, Hn
4	Esteban Ocon (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	+18.665s		Mn, Hn
5	Lance Stroll (CAN)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+20.067s		Su, Hu, Hu
6	Carlos Sainz (ESP)	Ferrari	+20.834s		Mn, Hn, Hn
7	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	Mercedes	+21.755s		Hu, Mu, Hn
8	George Russell (GBR)	Mercedes	+23.091s		Mn, Hn, Hn
9	Fernando Alonso (ESP)	Aston Martin-Mercedes	+25.964s		Mn, Hu, Hu
10	Oscar Piastri (AUS)	McLaren-Mercedes	+29.496s		Hu, Hu, Mu
11	Pierre Gasly (FRA)	Alpine-Renault	+34.270s		Mn, Hn
12	Alexander Albon (THA)	Williams-Mercedes	+43.398s		Mn, Hn
13	Kevin Magnussen (DNK)	Haas-Ferrari	+44.825s		Mn, Hn, Hn
14	Daniel Ricciardo (AUS)	AlphaTauri-Honda RBPT	+48.525s		Mn, Hu
15	Zhou Guanyu (CHN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	+50.162s		Hn, Mn
16	Logan Sargeant (USA)	Williams-Mercedes	+50.882s		Mn, Hn
17	Valtteri Bottas (FIN)	Alfa Romeo-Ferrari	+1m25.350s		Mn, Hn, Mn
18	Yuki Tsunoda (JPN)	AlphaTauri-Honda RBPT	46 laps-engine		Sn, Mn, Hn
19	Nico Hulkenberg (DEU)	Haas-Ferrari	45 laps-loss of power		Mn, Hn, Hn
R	Lando Norris (GBR)	McLaren-Mercedes	2 laps-accident		Mu

**FASTEST LAPS**

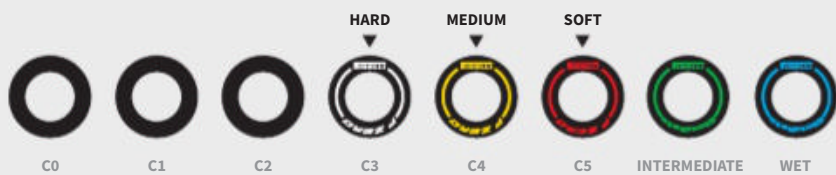
POS	DRIVER	TIME	GAP	LAP
1	Piastri	1m35.490s	-	47
2	Verstappen	1m35.614s	+0.124s	44
3	Leclerc	1m35.669s	+0.179s	50
4	Hamilton	1m35.716s	+0.226s	48
5	Perez	1m35.939s	+0.449s	40
6	Sainz	1m35.984s	+0.494s	47
7	Russell	1m36.071s	+0.581s	44
8	Alonso	1m36.559s	+1.069s	42
9	Stroll	1m36.584s	+1.094s	45
10	Ocon	1m36.637s	+1.147s	47
11	Gasly	1m36.913s	+1.423s	37
12	Ricciardo	1m37.108s	+1.618s	50
13	Albon	1m37.357s	+1.867s	50
14	Zhou	1m37.375s	+1.885s	32
15	Magnussen	1m37.455s	+1.965s	50
16	Bottas	1m37.562s	+2.072s	49
17	Hulkenberg	1m37.565s	+2.075s	43
18	Tsunoda	1m37.587s	+2.097s	45
19	Sargeant	1m37.740s	+2.250s	32
20	Norris	1m59.327s	+23.837s	2

**WEATHER** Night, air 17-18C track 18-19C

**WINNER'S AVERAGE SPEED** 129.640mph **FASTEST LAP AVERAGE SPEED** 145.264mph

**TYRES**

KEY: H - Hard M - Medium S - Soft I - Intermediate W - Wet n - New set u - Used set



**RACE BRIEFING**

**GRID PENALTIES**

**SAINZ** 10-place penalty for additional power unit elements used  
**STROLL** Five-place penalty and three licence points for overtaking Sainz under yellow flags

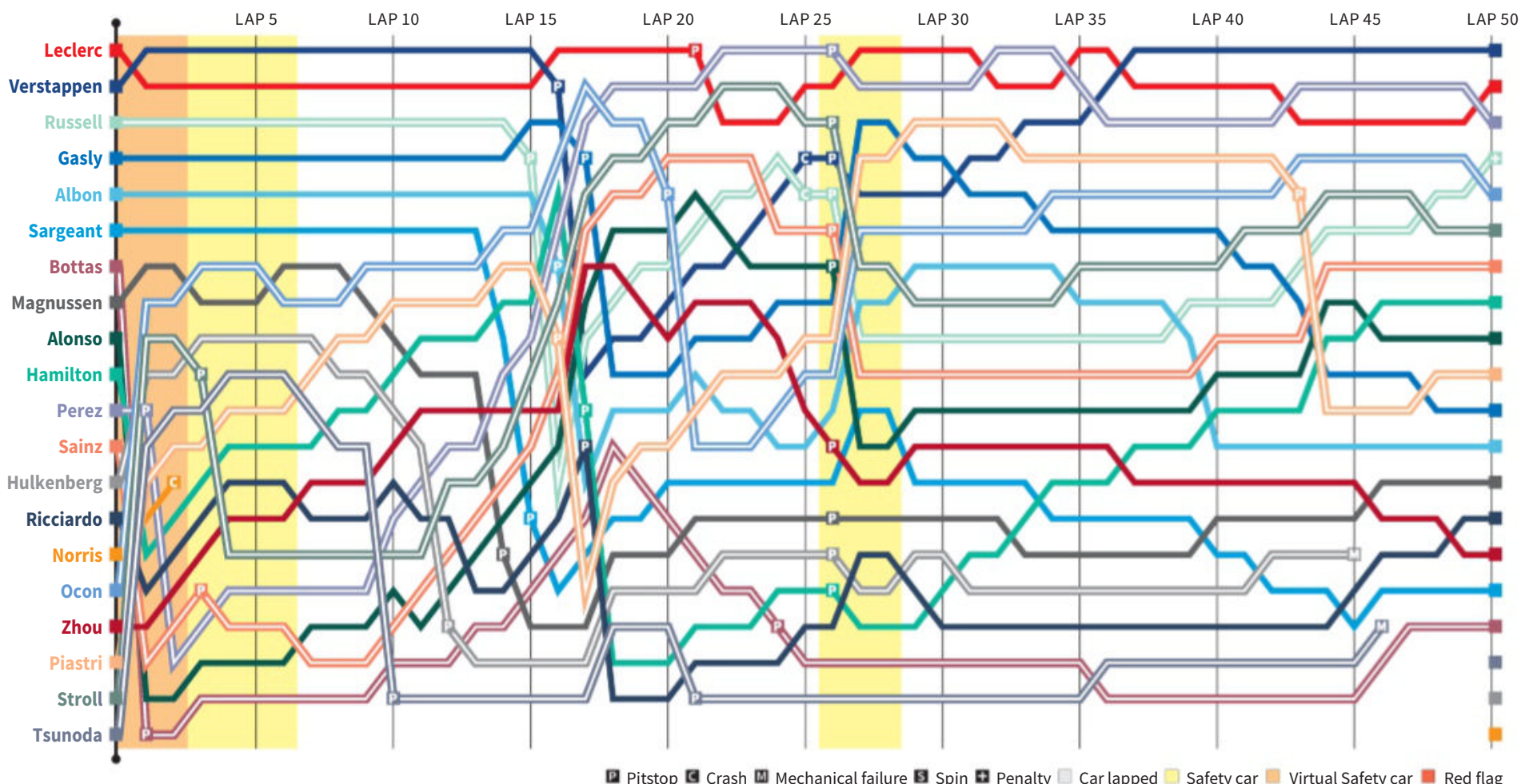
**RACE PENALTIES**

**VERSTAPPEN** 5s penalty and two licence points for forcing Leclerc off the track  
**RUSSELL** 5s penalty and two licence points for causing a collision with Verstappen

**256**

Perez has now started as many world championship GPs as Riccardo Patrese – and also has the same number of wins: six

**LAP CHART**



P Pitstop C Crash M Mechanical failure S Spin + Penalty Car lapped Safety car Virtual Safety car Red flag

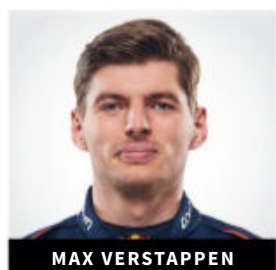


# LAS VEGAS GP DRIVER RATINGS

*Last of the late brakers and a capitalist from Turn 1 chaos topped our scores on the slippery new street circuit*

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

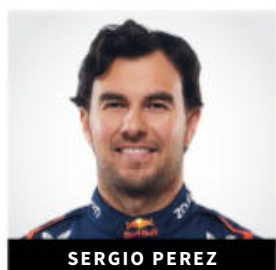
## RED BULL



MAX VERSTAPPEN

Started **2nd** — Result **1st**

**8** Whatever he did, he couldn't quite throw away the win. First-corner shenanigans versus Leclerc deserved a penalty, and then he perhaps pushed too hard too soon and medium tyres didn't hold on. But low-drag set-up got him back to the lead, and he did all he could to try to secure a Red Bull 1-2.



SERGIO PEREZ

Started **11th** — Result **3rd**

**8** At times looked comfortable in the lead. Victory hopes helped immensely by safety car timing, but made ground after early stop where others did not after first-lap contact. Choice of higher-drag rear wing cost speed on straight, leaving him vulnerable to Leclerc's daring last-lap pass.

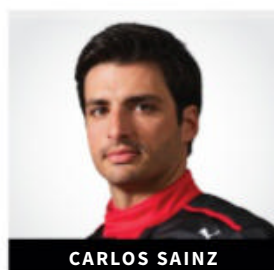
## FERRARI



CHARLES LECLERC

Started **1st** — Result **2nd**

**9** Was sitting on an 8/10 score, but last-lap overtake on Perez boosts him. Perhaps soft in defence against Red Bulls with DRS, but maybe for a reason: tyre management made his final-lap bid for second possible. Wide moment on lap 43 cost place to Perez, so not perfect, but it was his sole mistake.

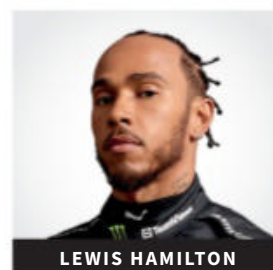


CARLOS SAINZ

Started **12th** — Result **6th**

**6** Channelled his energy into a battling drive, but was the architect of his own first-lap setbacks after steaming into Turn 1 and tagging Hamilton. Recovered from a spin and aided by safety car to make progress away from Alonso. At risk of a Hamilton attack had the race been a lap longer.

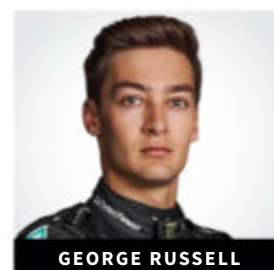
## MERCEDES



LEWIS HAMILTON

Started **10th** — Result **7th**

**7** Forced into two recoveries, so seventh wasn't a bad result. Was a victim of the Turn 1 bowling alley but got off lightly; puncture in avoidable Piastri contact put him well down the order. Recovered with great race pace, comparable to that of Leclerc and Perez, and was on Sainz's tail at the end.

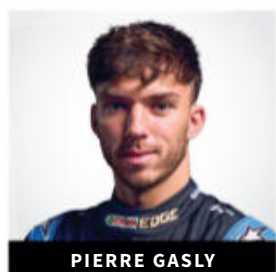


GEORGE RUSSELL

Started **3rd** — Result **8th**

**6** Scored down for avoidable contact with Verstappen, which cost him fourth place. Lost track position after first pitstop and fell behind non-stoppers during the mid-race safety car after Red Bull clash. Decisive recovery, but a better result was possible and probably expected.

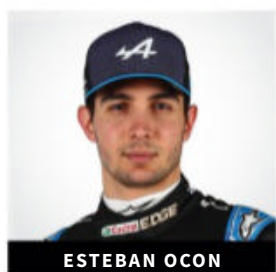
## ALPINE



PIERRE GASLY

Started **4th** — Result **11th**

**7** Hard to call. So impressive in the opening half of the race, but after the safety car interval he began a steady descent down the order as the tyres had started to grain and could not be revived. Continued to drop once behind team-mate Ocon, as battery issues sapped further pace.

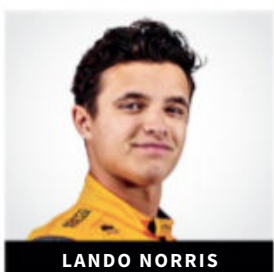


ESTEBAN OCON

Started **16th** — Result **4th**

**9** Avoided first-lap chaos to move from 16th on the grid to eighth. Managed his tyres well to be quick at the end, and proved that defying team orders to sit behind Gasly was the right call. Passed by penalty-encumbered Russell at the end, but nonetheless enjoyed a quietly impressive race.

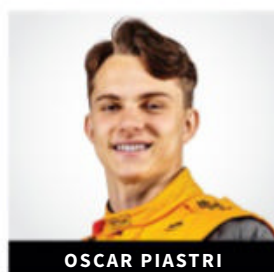
## MCLAREN



LANDO NORRIS

Started **15th** — Result **R**

**4** Harsh? Maybe. Was a passenger in his lap-three crash at Turn 12 thanks to cold tyres and a bump in the road after promising initial progress. It may have been avoidable with greater caution in opening laps, and the other 19 drivers avoided the same fate. Thankfully OK after brief hospital visit.

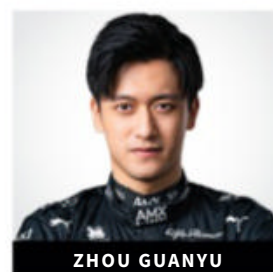


OSCAR PIASTR

Started **18th** — Result **10th**

**7** A far better race than his result shows, as poor qualifying was atoned for. Forced into premature pitstop after Hamilton clash, but shrugged off any ill-effects and stayed out during safety car to sit in top four. Had the pace to maintain it, but a need to stop after hard-hard tyre strategy set him back.

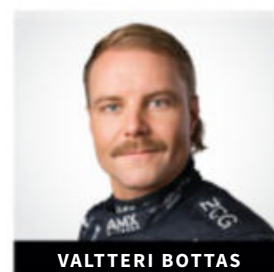
## ALFA ROMEO



ZHOU GUANYU

Started **17th** — Result **15th**

**4** Given that he made his sole pitstop under the mid-race safety car, more might have been expected. Sat on the brink of the top 10 before his stop, but this proved to be the zenith; he was eventually outclassed by Magnussen and Ricciardo at the close, with Sargeant looming large at the flag.

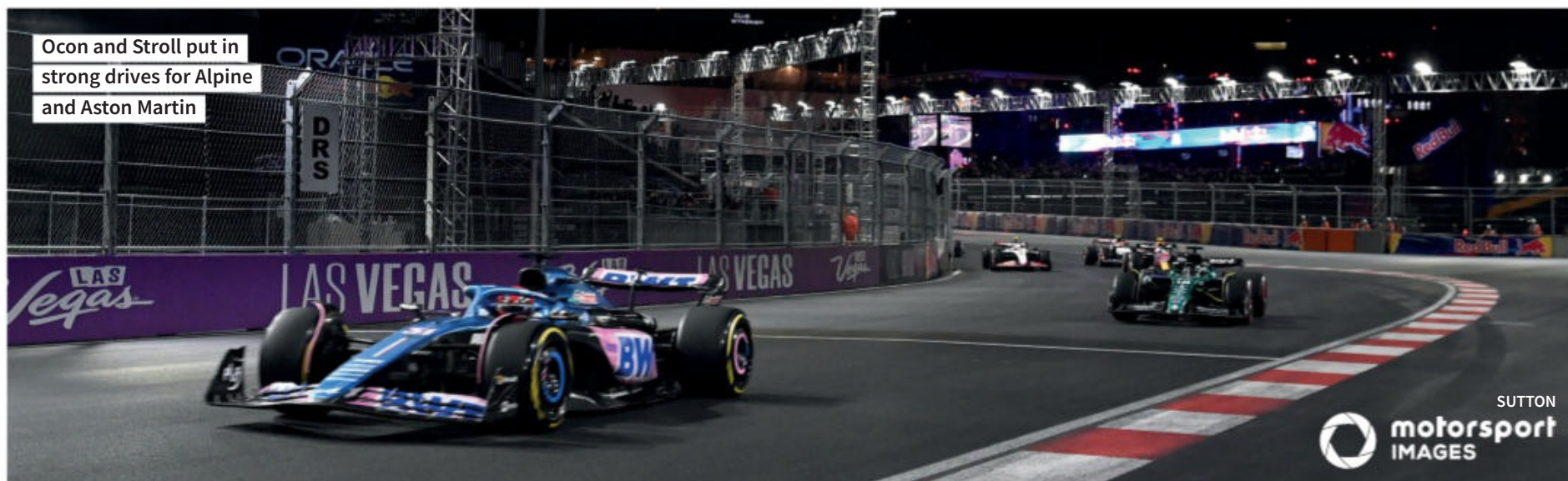


VALTTERI BOTTAS

Started **7th** — Result **17th**

**5** Did all he could, for his race was effectively over at Turn 1 after Perez clouted his diffuser. Struggled for grip even more with a compromised floor, and was effectively tasked with bringing the car home. Got up the order early on after pitting under the first safety car, but soon fell away again.





Ocon and Stroll put in strong drives for Alpine and Aston Martin

## ASTON MARTIN



FERNANDO ALONSO

Started **9th** — Result **9th**

**5** The invisible banana skin at Turn 1 left him with a hard task to get back into points. Initial ascent after pitting early was rapid, but began to tail off as tyres wore out; the safety car timing was opportune. Second stint was less effective, with other drivers' fading tyres stopping his stagnation.

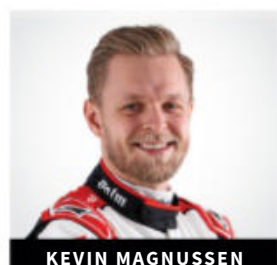


LANCE STROLL

Started **19th** — Result **5th**

**8** Found 10 places at the start, but came under attack from the Haas duo in opening laps. Early-pitting gamble amid first safety car offered significant track position, and second safety car came at the right time. Pounced on fading Gasly and Albon, but just lacked pace to catch Ocon.

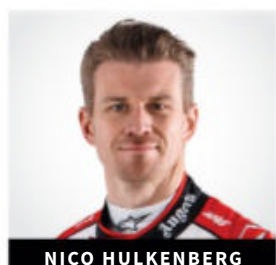
## HAAS



KEVIN MAGNUSSEN

Started **8th** — Result **13th**

**6** Lost a place to Ocon before the safety car, but nailed his restart to get it back. Initial hints of upward mobility were restricted by graining, resulting in a retreat to the midfield during the opening half. Stabilised after pitting under mid-race safety car, as tyres held up through the stint.

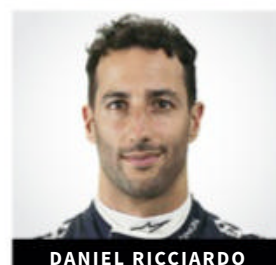


NICO HULKENBERG

Started **13th** — Result **19th**

**5** Reckoned that mitigating graining was the only thing restricting form, as cool temperatures resulted in lower degradation. Stuck behind Magnussen throughout. Battled with Sargeant late on, and looked set for 14th until a loss of power cost him. Had been happy until that point.

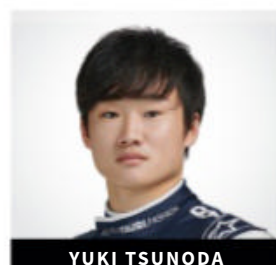
## ALPHATAURI



DANIEL RICCIARDO

Started **14th** — Result **14th**

**5** Disappointed with his result, as team struggled with low-grip surface throughout. Felt being overtaken on the outside of Turn 3 underlined his struggles, and lost ground on both restarts. Got past Zhou at the end, reckoning that the race settling down played to his strengths.

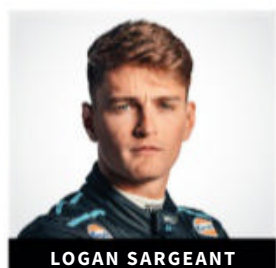


YUKI TSUNODA

Started **20th** — Result **18th**

**4** Decision to start on softs paid off with monster leap through the order but, unlike Stroll, stuck with them and fell back as a result. Graining kept progress on ice, with pace suffering as a result to leave him consigned to the back. Powertrain issues resulted in retirement a few laps from home.

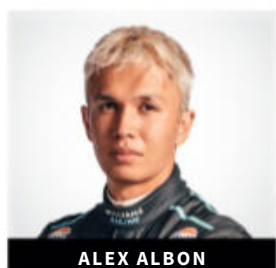
## WILLIAMS



LOGAN SARGEANT

Started **6th** — Result **16th**

**6** Can probably consider himself unfortunate with tyre graining and safety cars as his race had been strong in the first half. Looked steady in the top six, but things started to unravel when Ocon passed. Sat on the cusp of the top 10 after second safety car, but could not hold on with ageing tyres.

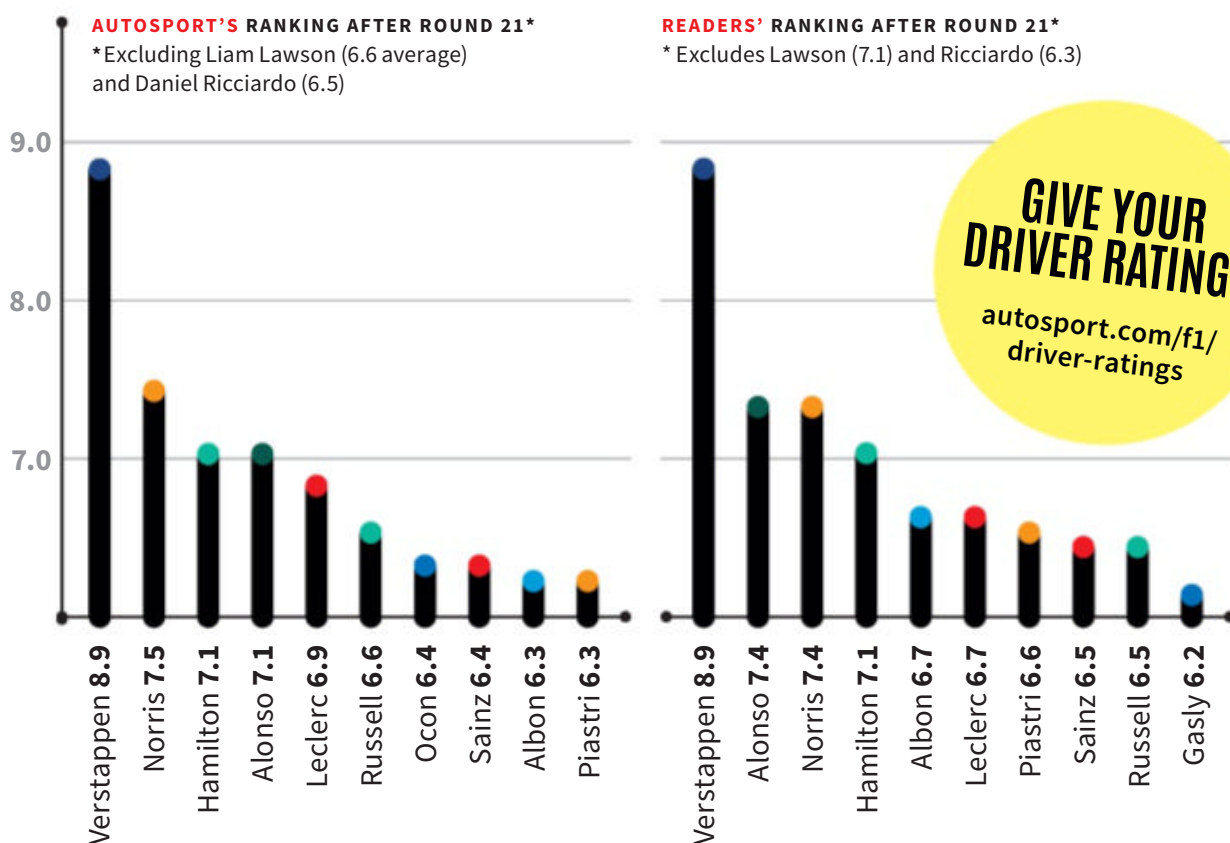


ALEX ALBON

Started **5th** — Result **12th**

**6** Faced a similar scenario to Gasly, where a strong qualifying result was wasted as tyre wear began to bite. Initial efforts to defend fifth paid off, but second-stint graining cost him. Fell out of the points from there as tyre issues worsened, and recovery signs arrived too late on.

### TOP 10 AVERAGE RATINGS





WRC

# Evans makes Toyota's dreams come true

*Unpredictable conditions threatened to ruin the script, but the champion team was not to be denied a podium lock-out on home soil*

TOM HOWARD



**J**apan threw the proverbial kitchen sink at World Rally Championship crews as extreme changeable weather added to the already demanding rally of 10,000 corners. But the 'four-seasons-in-one-day' conditions failed to derail Elfyn Evans from delivering Toyota the home win it so craved.

With Kalle Rovanpera and Toyota having wrapped up the respective drivers' and manufacturers' titles in October, you could be forgiven for thinking that the WRC season finale in the land of the rising sun would be a relaxed dead rubber affair. It was anything but. After Toyota had suffered defeat to rival Hyundai on home soil last year, the pressure for the marque to win a rally held in its own back yard, Toyota City, was palpable.

But the rally gods seemingly didn't want to give in to Toyota's wishes easily, and rain, sunshine and even snow showers tested crews to their very limits. It was perhaps fitting that Evans and Scott Martin, who were denied a shot at victory in Japan last year by a final-day puncture, produced one of the drives of the season to clinch victory. Toyota got what it wished for and more when Sebastien Ogier and Rovanpera completed a dream 1-2-3 to underline the manufacturer's domination of 2023. "Of course, under the circumstances it's special to win with your teammates side by side," smiled Evans. "It's been mega."

There had been few smiles in the Toyota camp after a humbling by Hyundai on the opening stage, the first of three passes through the all-new Toyota Stadium side-by-side superspecial, packed with

fans inside the rally's bustling service park.

First blood went to Thierry Neuville, who pipped team-mate Esapekka Lappi by 0.7 seconds just hours after it was confirmed that the Finn will scale back to a part-time programme with the South Korean manufacturer next year. Toyota's struggles were outlined by all four of its GR Yaris being outside of the top four, with home hero Takamoto Katsuta fifth ahead of Rovanpera, while Ogier and Evans were eighth and ninth respectively.

Toyota's fortunes would soon turn, much like the weather, come

**“On the recce the pine needles were like ice. If it's wet, I don't want to know how it will be”**

Friday morning. Concerns over the conditions were raised on the previous day given the carpet of leaves and pine needles that blanketed the technical asphalt roads. This, coupled with rain, had the drivers worried. Calls were made for the roads to be cleaned.

“Being first on the road is not going to be easy,” predicted Rovanpera, who has never been a fan of Japan's stages. “On the recce when we had a section with the pine needles it was like ice, and in some places you don't even see the Tarmac. And if it's wet, I don't



WRC  
50  
YEARS



MAIN PIC: KALINSKI

REE/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

want to know how it will be. It will be a big challenge, for sure.”

Rovanpera was correct, and torrential rain caused havoc, creating what the Finn described as “the most difficult conditions I’ve seen”. To add to the slippery surface and treacherous patches of standing water, misted-up windscreens left Rally1 crews desperately struggling for visibility.

M-Sport’s Ott Tanak suffered the worst, and was forced to crouch in his Ford Puma’s seat to try to peer through the fog. “I’m quite seasick to be honest – there is no reason to drive like this,” grumbled Tanak, who dropped almost four minutes.

Neuville summed up how severe things were. “The conditions are really, really dangerous,” proclaimed the bespectacled Walloon. “We shouldn’t be driving in them. I have done a lot of rallies, but I’ve never been as scared as this morning.”

It wasn’t long until drama struck. First, Katsuta was caught out by

a patch of standing water on stage two (Isegami’s Tunnel) and collided with trees, damaging the radiator on his GR Yaris. The incident arrived after he’d set a blistering time at the first split. The fan favourite lost 2m29s, effectively ending his victory hopes on the spot, but at least he was able to continue, unlike two of his rivals.

At the same spot, Hyundai’s Dani Sordo and then M-Sport’s Adrien Fourmaux hit the same standing water, and careered off the road down an embankment. Fourmaux, making his Rally1 return in place of Pierre-Louis Loubet, stopped within metres of Sordo’s stricken i20N, prompting the red flags. All crews were OK but neither was able to rejoin the rally.

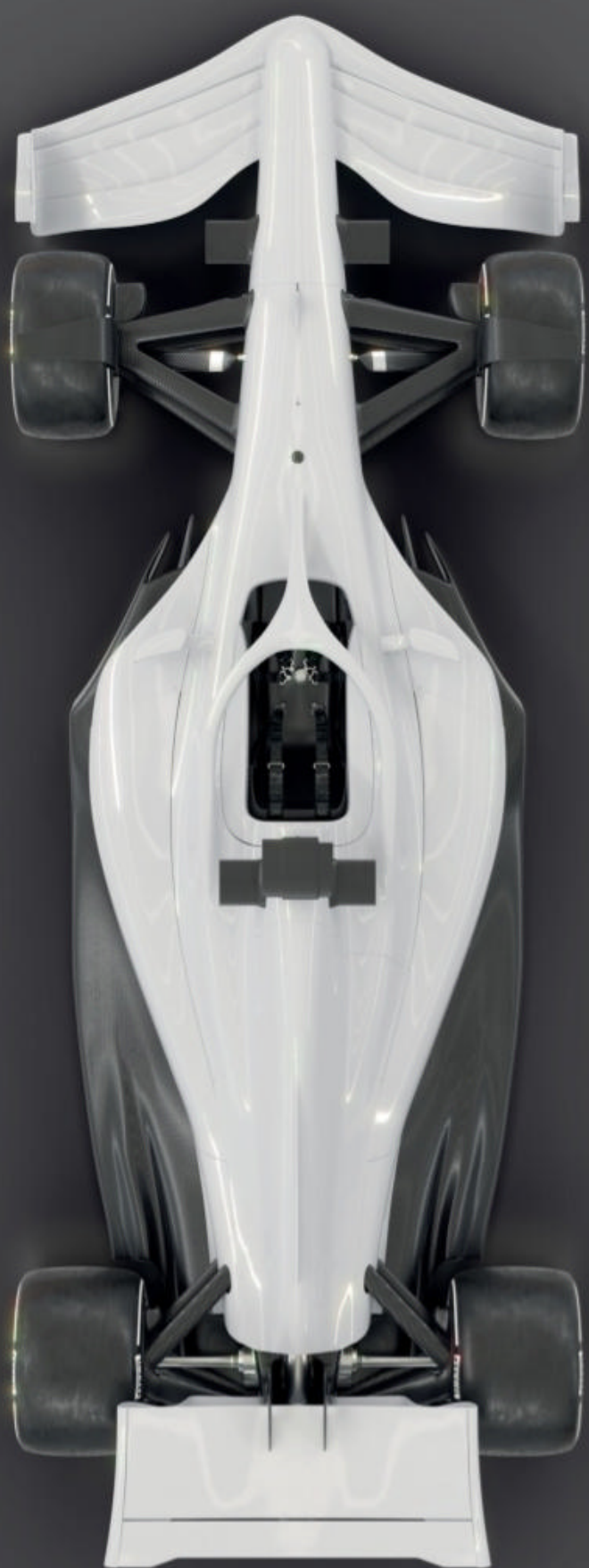
“We had a lot of fog on the windscreen so I didn’t see Dani trying to slow us down,” related Fourmaux. “As soon as I touched the brakes it was like ice.”

Sordo, whose rally ended on the same stage in a ball of flames >>



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Fancy seeing you here:  
Sordo's Hyundai and  
Fourmaux's Puma meet

## “At every left corner I couldn't see anything. It's a shame that we have to go through that”

last year, added: “We just missed the braking 11 kilometres into the stage. We started aquaplaning and we went straight on. I touched the brakes and one side locked up. We also had some mist on our screen, which was a little distracting.”

Evans not only avoided the trouble but did so in impressive style to shoot from ninth position into a 26s rally lead over Neuville after stage three.

The Welshman, who was running second on the road, was unable to explain his speed. “I have no idea,” he admitted. “I thought I was going to be a minute down coming to end of the first one, it was impossible to judge.”

Organisers cancelled stage four due to the adverse weather preventing the medical helicopter from flying. Ogier, who found himself in third, felt the entire loop should have been cancelled. “There was a couple of centimetres left in the windscreen where I could still see something, but at every left corner I couldn't see anything, and you just hope these couple of centimetres will stay otherwise you have to stop,” sighed the Frenchman. “It's a shame that we have to go through that.”

While the Rally1 cars struggled for visibility, the Rally2 field benefited from much clearer windscreens, and WRC2 champion Andreas Mikkelsen starred to end the loop fourth overall ahead of fellow class contenders Gregoire Munster and Nikolay Gryazin.



Mikkelsen mixed it with  
the Rally1 crews on his  
way to a class victory

MCKLEIN





The rain relented for the afternoon loop, but it didn't halt the drama. Evans's rally lead was reduced to 10.5s after stage five by a charging Neuville, but the threat from the Belgian quickly evaporated. A compression 100 metres into stage six (Inabu Dam) caught out the Hyundai driver and his i20N understeered into trees, ending any hopes of a second consecutive Japan victory. "I was a bit too optimistic in that compression and I hit the sump guard, and it threw me out of the line," he grimaced. "So it was very unfortunate, but that's it."

Neuville's team principal Cyril Abiteboul felt his driver was impatient to catch rally leader Evans: "We were all very impressed with his first stage of the afternoon, which cut the gap by 15s to Elfyn. He was probably a bit too much in a rush to recover the gap to Elfyn, which led to a mistake and a misjudgement of the speed to tackle that compression. It is what it is. But it's tough losing two cars, and Esapekka is clearly struggling with confidence after a bad stint of events. We have to reflect to see if there is something we can do to limit [errors] in the future, because it's very clear that he [Neuville] has the ambition of winning the world championship title."

Neuville's exit not only eased the growing pressure on Evans, but handed Toyota a 1-2-3 at the end of Friday, as Rovaniemi managed to haul himself into the final podium spot. The odds on Evans claiming a third win of 2023 were further shortened when nearest rival Ogier was handed a one-minute penalty for being six minutes late from the final service. The eight-time champion hailed the effort from his crew to replace a damaged section of rollcage caused from a driver's side impact with a barrier on stage five, but it left Ogier 1m49.9s adrift of Evans.

"They [the mechanics] did an amazing job again so I think now the most important thing for us is to bring all three cars home," reflected Ogier.

The leaderboard continued to have an odd look, with Mikkelsen ending the day fourth ahead of Munster and Gryazin. An out-of-sorts Lappi was seventh ahead of Tanak and the recovering Katsuta, who proved his early pace was real by winning three of the four afternoon/evening stages.

Crews welcomed the arrival of dry weather on Saturday, but this was short-lived and replaced by a freak snow shower in the afternoon, when Japan's asphalt stages took on a distinct Monte Carlo feel. But prior to this latest weather curveball, there was another unexpected situation that unfolded, triggering the red flags.

The returning Neuville, driving a repaired i20N, alarmingly came across the zero car stranded in stage nine. The Belgian managed to pull his car up before navigating past the vehicle. Katsuta also encountered the car, which had stopped in the stage to remove spectators from standing in a dangerous location. A stewards >>

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investigation revealed that a miscommunication between the zero car crew, stage commander and the clerk of the course, coupled with a lack of radio signal, resulted in the stage incorrectly going ahead.

Clerk of the course Haruo Takakuwa accepted full responsibility for causing an unsafe situation and was reprimanded by the stewards. Neuville, Katsuta, Lappi and Tanak were all handed notional times. The matter will be referred to the FIA WRC Commission for possible further action.

At the front, Evans remained in control and perfectly managed his pace given his sizeable advantage. The only scare arrived courtesy of the freak snow shower that affected the later runners

## “It has been quite annoying. Just when you think there will be a dry loop, it starts to snow”

in stage 14, warranting a cry of “I don’t believe it” from the usually calm and reserved Evans. What must have felt like dropping a minute on the incredibly slippery asphalt actually turned out to be only 11.4s to nearest rival Ogier.

The irony of this latest bout of freak weather was not lost on third-placed Rovanger, who coined Rally Japan as the ‘rally that keeps on giving’. “It has been quite annoying as just when you think there will be a dry loop and you enjoy it a bit, it starts to snow,” he reckoned.

With the battle at the front a stalemate, it was Katsuta who provided the entertainment, winning five of the day’s eight stages to climb to sixth, with his sights set on overhauling Lappi and Tanak in fourth and fifth. The Japanese driver has struggled for confidence at times this season, but declared Saturday as the best he’d felt in the car this year.

“After yesterday my mind has changed and I have been just focusing on doing my best, but if I’m honest in the back of my head there is disappointment, but I just have to forget it,” summed up Katsuta, who ultimately won 10 of the 22 stages.

Following the series of weather curveballs, Evans refused to start thinking of victory despite heading into Sunday’s final six stages with a 1m15.0s lead. Overnight snow again threatened to spoil the Toyota homecoming party, but the three Yarises at the front held firm to complete a dream 1-2-3.



Lappi held off Katsuta to deny Toyota a 1-2-3-4

KALINSKI

Evans, desperate not to lose the victory, even managed to extend his lead to 1m17.7s come the finish to record a third win of the season, matching the season tally of his team-mates Ogier and Rovanger. Toyota’s final 2023 objective was achieved, and the pressure valve was finally released. Cue a chorus of “we are the champions” led by Evans’s co-driver Martin in the post-event press conference.

“It’s been a difficult rally and I felt a bit of unfinished business after last year, so it’s nice to score a result this way,” grinned Evans. “Yeah, definitely [there was pressure]. From a finishing point of view you look like a fool if you chuck it off and honestly it would be something so easy to do. A minor misjudgement somewhere was all it would have taken in the conditions we had.”

Lappi found pace at the right time to deny Toyota a second 1-2-3-4 of this season by holding off an inspired Katsuta, who leapfrogged Tanak (competing in his final event for M-Sport) to claim fifth. WRC2 champion Mikkelsen was rewarded with seventh in his Skoda after his Friday heroics.

As the final chapter of the WRC season closes, thoughts already turn to the start of the next in Monte Carlo in January. This year Evans has delivered Toyota ‘home’ wins in Finland and now Japan. Surely a world title is the next target to be looming large now that we know his championship rival Rovanger won’t contest a full season in 2024... ❄️



Fan favourite Katsuta showed pace, salvaging fifth ahead of Tanak

McKLEIN



**MISTY SCREENS LEAVE  
EGGS ON FACES**



Sebastien Ogier has led a call to find a solution to the fogging of windscreens on Rally1 cars that affected drivers' visibility in Japan last weekend.

Misted-up windscreens were a hot topic on Friday as extreme wet weather hit the stages. The issue afflicted the spaceframe Rally1 cars more severely than Rally2 machines derived from their production-based models.

Ogier, who was among a number of Rally1 drivers affected, believes the problem should be part of the WRC's future rethink.

When asked if the addition of an air conditioning unit could help resolve the issue, he said: "I think it would be very tricky because those cars are full of water inside and they are nearly impossible to build waterproof because of this tubular frame and the carbon panels around it.

"Maybe it's part of the whole rethink we need to have about our sport. These cars have this problem, and they are extremely expensive. Maybe there is a way to go back to something a bit more simple, and maybe avoid this kind of problem."

Hyundai team principal Cyril Abiteboul says his team plans to find a fix, admitting that it's "embarrassing". "It's amazing that we are not capable of addressing an issue like that when you look at the cost of the cars," said Abiteboul.

"We know it's not a standard dashboard because we are all trained to optimise things, but we know that these things happen, so maybe we should invest a bit more in this technology and a bit less aero. It's a bit embarrassing, and it's not great PR for the Rally1 cars and clearly it's something we can do better. We will try to fix this as we do need to give a better image."

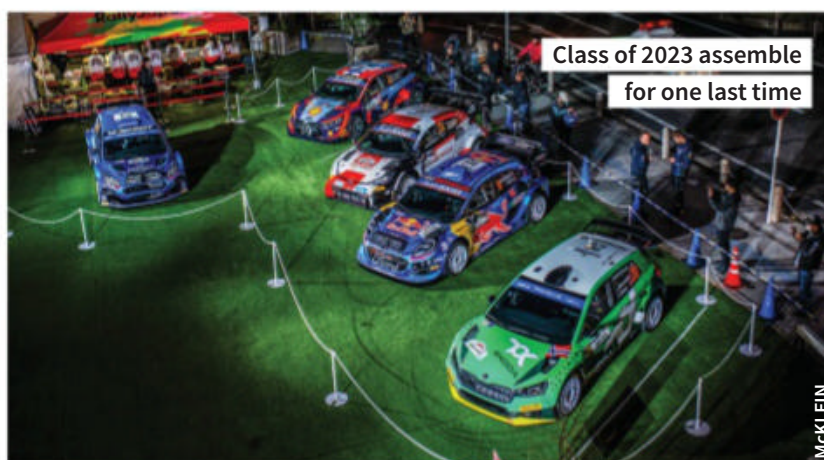
FIA road sport director Andrew Wheatley added: "I think the teams are clever and they will know what to do to fix it. I'm not sure it will happen so many times again."

**RESULTS ROUND 13/13, RALLY JAPAN, 16-19 NOVEMBER**

POS	DRIVER / CO-DRIVER	TEAM / CAR	TIME
1	<b>Elfyn Evans</b> (GBR) <b>Scott Martin</b> (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	3h32m08.8s
2	<b>Sebastien Ogier</b> (FRA) <b>Vincent Landais</b> (FRA)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+1m17.7s
3	<b>Kalle Rovanpera</b> (FIN) <b>Jonne Halttunen</b> (FIN)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+1m46.5s
4	<b>Esapekka Lappi</b> (FIN) <b>Janne Ferm</b> (FIN)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT Hyundai i20 N Rally1	+2m50.3s
5	<b>Takamoto Katsuta</b> (JPN) <b>Aaron Johnston</b> (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT Toyota GR Yaris Rally1	+3m10.3s
6	<b>Ott Tanak</b> (EST) <b>Martin Jarveoja</b> (EST)	M-Sport Ford WRT Ford Puma Rally1	+3m28.3s
7	<b>Andreas Mikkelsen</b> (NOR) <b>Torstein Eriksen</b> (NOR)	Toksport WRT 3 Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+7m33.7s
8	<b>Nikolay Gryazin</b> (RUS) <b>Konstantin Aleksandrov</b> (RUS)	Toksport WRT 3 Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+8m49.6s
9	<b>Kajetan Kajetanowicz</b> (POL) <b>Maciek Szczepaniak</b> (POL)	Skoda Fabia RS Rally2	+19m25.9s
10	<b>Hiroki Arai</b> (JPN) <b>Hiroki Tachikui</b> (JPN)	Peugeot 208 Rally4	+22m22.7s
<b>OTHERS</b>			
13	<b>Thierry Neuville</b> (BEL) <b>Martijn Wydaeghe</b> (BEL)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT Hyundai i20 N Rally1	+28m24.7s
R	<b>Dani Sordo</b> (ESP) <b>Candido Carrera</b> (ESP)	Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT Hyundai i20 N Rally1	SS2-accident
R	<b>Adrien Fourmaux</b> (FRA) <b>Alexandre Coria</b> (FRA)	M-Sport Ford WRT Ford Puma Rally1	SS2-accident

**STAGE TIMES**

STAGE	FASTEST	LEADER	SECOND
SS1 <b>Toyota Stadium 1</b> (1.30 miles)	Neuville 1m47.6s	<b>Neuville</b>	Lappi+0.7s
SS2 <b>Isegami's Tunnel 1</b> (14.71 miles)	Evans 20m17.8s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+3.8s
SS3 <b>Inabu Dam 1</b> (12.04 miles)	Evans 14m20.0s	<b>Evans</b>	Neuville+26.0s
SS4 <b>Shitara Town 1</b> (14.00 miles)	Stage cancelled		
SS5 <b>Isegami's Tunnel 2</b> (14.71 miles)	Katsuta 19m08.1s	<b>Evans</b>	Neuville+10.5s
SS6 <b>Inabu Dam 2</b> (12.04 miles)	Katsuta 12m48.5s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+44.4s
SS7 <b>Shitara Town 2</b> (14.00 miles)	Katsuta 14m33.6s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m50.9s
SS8 <b>Toyota Stadium 2</b> (1.30 miles)	Lappi 2m00.0s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m49.9s
SS9 <b>Nukata Forest 1</b> (12.63 miles)	Ogier and Katsuta 15m23.2s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m46.8s
SS10 <b>Lake Mikawako 1</b> (9.18 miles)	Katsuta 11m14.8s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m33.5s
SS11 <b>Okazaki City 1</b> (1.76 miles)	Evans 2m20.2s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m34.3s
SS12 <b>Okazaki City 2</b> (1.76 miles)	Evans 2m18.7s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m35.5s
SS13 <b>Nukata Forest 2</b> (12.63 miles)	Katsuta 14m33.5s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m24.8s
SS14 <b>Lake Mikawako 2</b> (9.18 miles)	Katsuta 10m35.8s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m13.4s
SS15 <b>Shinshiro City</b> (4.16 miles)	Katsuta 3m19.7s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m14.3s
SS16 <b>Toyota Stadium 3</b> (1.30 miles)	Lappi 1m47.0s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m15.0s
SS17 <b>Asahi Kougen</b> (4.67 miles)	Neuville 5m04.2s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m16.8s
SS18 <b>Ena City 1</b> (14.24 miles)	Neuville 18m09.9s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m23.0s
SS19 <b>Nenoue Kougen 1</b> (7.21 miles)	Katsuta 8m16.3s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m24.6s
SS20 <b>Ena City 2</b> (14.24 miles)	Neuville 18m03.7s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m20.0s
SS21 <b>Nenoue Kougen 2</b> (7.21 miles)	Katsuta 8m16.6s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m23.7s
SS22 <b>Asahi Kougen Wolf Power Stage</b> (4.67 miles)	Neuville 4m48.8s	<b>Evans</b>	Ogier+1m17.7s



**DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP**

- 1 **Rovanpera** 250; 2 **Evans** 216;
- 3 **Neuville** 189; 4 **Tanak** 174;
- 5 **Ogier** 133; 6 **Lappi** 113;
- 7 **Katsuta** 101; 8 **Sordo** 63;
- 9 **Teemu Suninen** 42;
- 10 **Oliver Solberg** 33.

**MANUFACTURERS' CHAMPIONSHIP**

- 1 **Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT** 548;
- 2 **Hyundai Shell Mobis WRT** 432;
- 3 **M-Sport Ford WRT** 287.



# Sensational Browning is new master of Macau

*The Williams F1 protege has had a tough F3 season, but topped qualifying, won on Saturday, and then claimed the big one on Sunday amid drama*

JAMIE KLEIN

PHOTOGRAPHY MACAU GRAND PRIX

**T**he 70th edition of the Macau Grand Prix provided a unique opportunity for a new star to be born, as the FIA F3 World Cup retook its rightful place at the top of the bill following a COVID-enforced three-year hiatus. And after a thrilling encounter that lasted almost as long as the ‘other’ street race going on in Las Vegas, it was Luke Browning who proved the class of the field, the Williams junior adding his name to the illustrious roll call of Macau winners.

Few would have identified Hitech GP driver Browning as the one to watch heading into first practice. After all, the 21-year-old from Cheshire had finished way down in 15th in the FIA F3 standings driving for the same team, with just a single visit to the podium.

And yet, from the very first practice session of the weekend on Thursday, 2022 Aston Martin Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award winner Browning was up there, second only to Prema Racing pacesetter Gabriele Mini. The pattern was the same in first qualifying that day, with Alpine protege Mini half a second quicker than Browning. But in the qualifying session that mattered on Friday, it was Browning who was quicker by a scant 0.006 seconds.

Rarely does the poleman at Macau end up leading every lap of both races, but that’s exactly what Browning managed to achieve. His pace on cold tyres was phenomenal, shown clearly by his gapping of Mini by a daunting 1.8s on the opening lap of the qualifying race after seeing off a challenge into Lisboa, and after that he had every restart under control.

The first of those came on lap five of Saturday’s 10-lap contest that set the grid for the main event on Sunday, after Dan Ticktum was put into the barriers at Lisboa courtesy of an overoptimistic lunge from F3 debutant and McLaren protege Ugo Ugochukwu. While Browning kept the lead, Mini found himself demoted by another Hitech driver, Irish teenager Alex Dunne, who had vaulted from sixth to third at the original start.



That was how they finished the qualifying race, with Browning two seconds clear of Dunne at the chequered flag, and Mini completing the podium a similar distance behind.

For the start of the 15-lap main race, Dunne made a slightly sluggish launch from second on the grid, losing second to Mini as the field swept through Mandarin for the first time. Browning hugged the inside with Mini in tow, but the Italian braked early, forcing Dunne over to the outside, whereupon he failed to get his Hitech machine slowed and ended up head-first in the Lisboa barriers. It was a heartbreaking end to a very promising weekend.

Dunne, this year’s GB3 runner-up who had only tested the F3 car for a single day before coming to Macau, glumly recalled: “It felt like I braked relatively early, I didn’t even lock a wheel, but for whatever

**“It felt like I braked relatively early, I didn’t lock a wheel, but I couldn’t get the car stopped”**

reason I couldn’t get the car stopped. It must have been something I did wrong, but I don’t know what exactly. The weekend went really well up to that point, but now it doesn’t really matter. Nobody remembers the first race, it’s the big one that counts.”

That incident triggered a virtual safety car, and the green flags were out by the time Browning completed the first lap, one second clear of Mini. He had doubled that margin the next time around before the VSC was deployed again, this time for Dino Beganovic clouting the wall at Lisboa in a doomed bid to pass his Prema team-mate Mini for second.

Browning found his lead cut in half when the VSC ended just as he was rounding the ultra-slow Melco hairpin, but he had the advantage back up to over two seconds when the race was interrupted again, this time for a rather more dramatic shunt involving a Prema driver. Paul Aron had been running third after Beganovic’s crash, but lost out to MP Motorsport pair Dennis Hauger and Mari Boya on consecutive laps on the run down to Lisboa. Aron was defending hard from Pepe Marti (Campos Racing) on lap eight when he suddenly lost control of his Prema machine at the Solitude esses due to a right-rear toe-link failure, putting him hard into the wall at the Paiol left-hander, with the rear axle of the car torn off in the shunt.

With flames consuming the remainder of the car (happily not before Aron hopped out unaided) and the barriers damaged, the red flags were shown, leading to a 55-minute delay before action could finally resume with Browning leading Mini and Hauger.

After two laps behind the safety car, the stage was set for >>





F3 back in Macau!  
Browning leads from Mini  
at start of qualifying race



We're sure Hauger, Browning  
and Mini were happy with  
their podiums really!





a four-lap shootout, and it was 2021 F3 champion Hauger, a last-minute stand-in for an injured Franco Colapinto at MP, who was the man on the move. Seemingly with his car optimised for straightline speed, Hauger was clear of Mini by the time the field arrived at Mandarin, and such was his momentum that he briefly got the nose of his orange machine ahead of Browning.

But Browning continued to hug the inside line and managed to fend off Hauger into Lisboa, and his prodigious pace around the Mountain section allowed him to pull away once more before the race was neutralised again, this time for Nikola Tsolov crashing at Fishermen's Bend. The clean-up operation couldn't be completed in time for the race to be resumed, and so Browning took the chequered flag under caution to put his name alongside such past greats as Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher – and give Hitech its first Macau triumph.

“Alongside the [Aston Martin] Autosport [BRDC] Award, it's the biggest achievement of my career to date,” smiled Browning after the race. “It's thoroughly humbling to put my name on that list. It feels surreal. Now when my career starts to ramp up and I'm driving these sorts of circuits with professional people around me against the best drivers in the world and succeeding at it... words can't describe it. I am a happy boy.”

Browning revealed that he had prepared for the biggest win of his career by watching “every start of Macau, up until this point”, concluding that hugging the inside line “seemed to be the highest success rate. I was trying to give Dennis and Gabriele an equal

**“It's thoroughly humbling to put my name on that list. It feels surreal. I am a happy boy”**

amount of tow down the straight, so that they caught me in the slowest amount of time. I did it for both races, and I just managed to hang on. But the last one was super-tight.”

For his part, Hauger was magnanimous in defeat, regretting that he didn't qualify better for the opening race of the weekend. But a little under four months on from being told by Red Bull junior supremo Helmut Marko that his services wouldn't be required for 2024, just an hour before Formula 2 qualifying at Spa, second was still a satisfying result for the Norwegian.

“All the cars are set up differently, but to be fair it's more because I was just on the back foot the whole weekend, starting P8 [for the qualifying race] and P5 [for the final],” said Hauger of the final restart. “I guess I always had the right tow, because Mini got out of Luke's tow and I stayed flat through Mandarin. It was just a matter of good timing, but I think I maximised it.”

Mini, the only Prema driver to see the chequered flag, was third, while Boya, another driver who didn't have much success during the season itself, was an impressive fourth. Marti, a recent addition to the Red Bull young driver programme, came home fifth, after being allowed to replace the front wing he damaged at the time of Aron's crash under the red flags. Charlie Wurz was the next car in the queue at the time, but the son of ex-F1 racer Alex was less fortunate – the damage his Jenzer Motorsport car sustained in the chaos put him out of the race.

Richard Verschoor, carrying the #1 plate from his 2019 triumph, was a relatively quiet sixth for Trident ahead of two more of his rivals from F2 this year, Isack Hadjar (Hitech) and Zane Maloney (Rodin Carlin). While Red Bull has kept faith in Hadjar after a rough season, Maloney joins Hauger in being discarded for the 2024 campaign. Another new Red Bull recruit, Oliver Goethe (Campos), was ninth after a superb double pass on Laurens van Hoepen and Sophia Florsch in the closing stages, with ART Grand Prix's F3 debutant van Hoepen grabbing the final place in the top 10. 🏆



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## EXPERIENCE DOESN'T PAY OFF

Pre-race predictions that the group of four Macau veterans could have an edge over the rookies ended up being massively wide of the mark. But even in that context, Dan Ticktum's bid for a historic Macau hat-trick has to be seen as a disappointment.

Any hopes of victory were ended when the Rodin Carlin driver (below) was taken out by Ugo Ugochukwu in the qualifying race, but such were the struggles of the team (whose third entry curiously went unfilled) that even a podium was looking like a tall order at the time of the crash, for which Ugochukwu earned a penalty as well as the ire of the Formula E racer.

"The team is not where they should be," said Ticktum, who managed to fight his way from

the back of the grid to 13th in the final. "The car isn't quite in the window, but when you have had inexperienced drivers who don't give the best feedback all year, it's very tough for the team. We just didn't have the pace to come here and win this year."

IndyCar ace Marcus Armstrong also had a weekend to forget on his Macau return with MP Motorsport, although the Kiwi at least qualified fifth for the Saturday race, and might have finished in a similar position if it hadn't been for a first-lap tangle with Red Bull junior Isack Hadjar.

Armstrong wound up 18th in the main race after getting caught up in another incident, this time with Noel Leon, at Lisboa shortly before the red flags.



## RESULTS MACAU (CHN), 18-19 NOVEMBER (15 LAPS - 57.042 MILES)

POS	DRIVER	TEAM	TIME
1	<b>Luke Browning</b> (GBR)	Hitech GP	1h35m08.337s
2	<b>Dennis Hauger</b> (NOR)	MP Motorsport	+0.347s
3	<b>Gabriele Mini</b> (ITA)	Prema Racing	+0.699s
4	<b>Mari Boya</b> (ESP)	MP Motorsport	+1.038s
5	<b>Pepe Marti</b> (ESP)	Campos Racing	+1.309s
6	<b>Richard Verschoor</b> (NLD)	Trident	+1.759s
7	<b>Isack Hadjar</b> (FRA)	Hitech GP	+2.349s
8	<b>Zane Maloney</b> (BRB)	Rodin Carlin	+2.538s
9	<b>Oliver Goethe</b> (DNK)	Campos Racing	+2.820s
10	<b>Laurens van Hoepen</b> (NLD)	ART Grand Prix	+3.008s
11	<b>Sophia Florsch</b> (DEU)	Van Amersfoort Racing	+3.398s
12	<b>Roman Stanek</b> (CZE)	Trident	+3.969s
13	<b>Dan Ticktum</b> (GBR)	Rodin Carlin	+4.731s
14	<b>Tommy Smith</b> (AUS)	Van Amersfoort Racing	+5.012s
15	<b>Ugo Ugochukwu</b> (USA)	Trident	+5.130s
16	<b>Christian Mansell</b> (AUS)	ART Grand Prix	+5.479s
17	<b>Matias Zagazeta</b> (PER)	Jenzer Motorsport	+5.731s
18	<b>Marcus Armstrong</b> (NZL)	MP Motorsport	+6.861s
19	<b>Noel Leon</b> (MEX)	Van Amersfoort Racing	+7.640s
20	<b>Max Esterson</b> (USA)	Jenzer Motorsport	+13.221s
R	<b>Nikola Tsolov</b> (BGR)	ART Grand Prix	11 laps-accident
NC	<b>Sebastian Montoya</b> (COL)	Campos Racing	10 laps
R	<b>Charlie Wurz</b> (AUT)	Jenzer Motorsport	9 laps-damage
R	<b>Paul Aron</b> (EST)	Prema Racing	7 laps-accident
R	<b>Dino Beganovic</b> (SWE)	Prema Racing	2 laps-accident
R	<b>Alex Dunne</b> (IRL)	Hitech GP	0 laps-accident

**Winner's average speed** 35.973mph. **Fastest lap** Mini 2m06.342s, 108.357mph.

### QUALIFICATION RACE (10 LAPS - 38.028 MILES)

**1 Browning** 2m52.318s; **2 Dunne** +2.097s; **3 Mini** +4.441s; **4 Beganovic** +5.339s; **5 Hauger** +10.936s; **6 Boya** +13.082s; **7 Aron** +13.877s; **8 Marti** +17.224s; **9 Hadjar** +17.648s; **10 Maloney** +19.620s; **11 Wurz** +20.946s; **12 Verschoor** +21.490s; **13 Tsolov** +22.390s; **14 van Hoepen** +24.804s; **15 Florsch** +25.505s; **16 Esterson** +26.184s; **17 Leon** +26.610s; **18 Montoya** +27.535s; **19 Stanek** +28.329s; **20 Mansell** +28.896s; **21 Goethe** +29.894s; **22 Armstrong** +30.515s; **23 Smith** +34.908s; **24 Zagazeta** +37.750s; **R Ticktum** 1 lap-accident; **R Ugochukwu** 1 lap-accident.

**Winner's average speed** 84.909mph. **Fastest lap** Browning 2m06.257s, 108.430mph.

### QUALIFYING

**1 Browning** 2m05.435s; **2 Mini** 2m05.441s; **3 Beganovic** 2m05.518s; **4 Hadjar** 2m05.557s; **5 Armstrong** 2m05.732s; **6 Dunne** 2m05.755s; **7 Goethe** 2m06.092s; **8 Hauger** 2m06.135s; **9 Ugochukwu** 2m06.167s; **10 Boya** 2m06.192s; **11 Marti** 2m06.246s; **12 Verschoor** 2m06.323s; **13 Ticktum** 2m06.460s; **14 Aron** 2m06.475s; **15 Tsolov** 2m06.755s; **16 Maloney** 2m06.798s; **17 Florsch** 2m06.912s; **18 Wurz** 2m07.219s; **19 Leon** 2m07.368s; **20 Stanek** 2m07.433s; **21 Esterson** 2m07.507s; **22 van Hoepen** 2m07.540s; **23 Montoya** 2m07.656s; **24 Mansell** 2m08.049s; **25 Zagazeta** 2m08.489s; **26 Smith** 2m09.071s.



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'Lello' Marciello dominated in Macau, claiming pole and winning both races

## Yellow 'Lello' is mellow on Merc swansong



### FIA GT WORLD CUP MACAU (CHN) 18-19 NOVEMBER

Raffaele Marciello signed off on his seven-year tenure as a Mercedes driver in the finest possible style in Macau by becoming the first-ever repeat winner of the FIA GT World Cup.

The Swiss-born Italian was unstoppable throughout both the 12-lap qualifying race and the 16-lap finale at the wheel of his Landgraf Motorsport Mercedes-AMG GT3, delivering the marque its fifth Macau GT triumph in a row (including the three non-FIA status races held during the COVID-19 pandemic) by 2.5 seconds ahead of Audi's Edoardo Mortara.

It was the perfect way for Marciello to

conclude his time as a Mercedes driver ahead of his widely anticipated move to BMW in 2024. "We won so many things, the Macau wins, Spa [24 Hours], ADAC [GT Masters]," reflected Marciello. "There are my great moments. I will miss it, and it won't be easy to repeat it. This was my last gift for AMG and now I hope I will not be beaten by them!"

Mercedes-AMG customer racing boss Stefan Wendl added: "We've won big races, championships, the World Cup, I've enjoyed these years together. I wish him luck for the future, and we will stay friends anyway. He'll be part of the AMG family forever."

After a relatively close-fought qualifying session on Friday, it was clear that the Mercedes was the machine to have as the 20-car field blasted down to Lisboa

for the first time in Saturday's qualifying race, with third-place starter Maro Engel passing Mortara to make it a Mercedes 1-2 behind polesitter Marciello, and Dani Juncadella going from sixth to fourth.

Juncadella nearly made it a 1-2-3 for Mercedes when he went on the attack against Mortara at Lisboa after an early safety car restart, only to get squeezed into the wall. The caution was soon out again after an altogether more dramatic accident for Adderly Fong, who destroyed his Audi by spearing into the barriers exiting Mandarin. This one soon turned into a red flag, but Marciello wasn't to be headed at the restart, leading home Engel and Mortara.

At the start of Sunday's feature race, Marciello successfully repelled Engel and was running around a second clear of the Craft-Bamboo Mercedes when a crash for Chinese driver Weian Chen's Ferrari 488 GT3 at Lisboa brought out the safety car around half-distance. When the race got under way again, Engel couldn't upshift properly, didn't get up to speed, and Marciello raced away at the head of the field.

The result was that Marciello suddenly found himself with a three-second buffer over Mortara for the remaining seven laps, which he easily managed to the finish.

Mortara was less than impressed with Engel's behaviour. "He was braking at the restart, he was trying to get me to overtake him before the line," said the Absolute Audi driver. "I found that pretty dirty. And Raffaele didn't need that help; he was going to win anyway."

In his defence, Engel explained that he had been experiencing shifting trouble as







Is anything more colourful in motorsport than the GT World Cup in Macau?

ALL PICS: MACAU GRAND PRIX



Left to right: Mortara, Marciello and Farfus celebrate on podium

## RACE RESULTS

### FIA GT WORLD CUP MACAU (CHN)

**Final 1** Raffaele Marciello (Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo); 2 Edoardo Mortara (Audi R8 LMS GT3 Evo II); 3 Augusto Farfus (BMW M4 GT3); 4 Daniel Serra (Ferrari 296 GT3); 5 Daniel Juncadella (Mercedes); 6 Laurens Vanthoor (Porsche 911 GT3-R); 7 Christopher Haase (Audi); 8 Alessio Picariello (Porsche); 9 Earl Bamber (Porsche); 10 Leo Ye (Porsche).

**Qualification race 1** Marciello; 2 Maro Engel (Mercedes); 3 Mortara; 4 Farfus; 5 Sheldon van der Linde (BMW); 6 Serra.



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early as the fourth lap before he finally got stuck in second gear. “I tried to check all the cables and connections between the steering wheel and the dash and make sure that everything was connected,” he said. “I played around, then it went better for a lap.”

“On the lap before the safety car, I got stuck in first gear for quite a long time, and was then able to shift up. Behind the safety car, I tried to do everything I could, power cycle and so on, but nothing worked. Unfortunately that was the end for us.”

Mortara came under pressure from impressive Macau debutant Sheldon van der Linde in the fight for second, before the South African had to pit with a puncture. That paved the way for his BMW stablemate Augusto Farfus to bag the final spot on the

podium ahead of fellow Brazilian Daniel Serra, who was at the wheel of the sole Ferrari 296 GT3 in the field.

Juncadella was fifth, but left to rue the moment when he was ushered into the Lisboa barriers by Mortara in the qualifying race. “I had a massive run on Edo and I had to go for it,” he explained. “But I hesitated a bit, I wasn’t sure if I should squeeze him under braking, but looking at the replay I should have! And then he just didn’t give me enough room in the corner.”

Porsche, which had the best representation in the field with seven cars, endured a miserable weekend. The problem, as sixth-placed finisher Laurens Vanthoor explained, was that the 911 GT3-R was fast in the Mountain but too

slow on the straights to have any chance.

“I was completely screwed at the start of the qualifying race because so many cars overtook us on the straights,” said the Belgian. “Being quick in the mountain is OK for qualifying, but you can’t overtake anyone there. For the final we trimmed down the car a lot, still couldn’t overtake on the straight, but at least we could defend our position.” Porsche could take some small solace from winning the Silver Cup with Leo Ye Hongli, who beat more illustrious Porsche names including Matteo Cairoli and Kevin Estre en route to 10th.

**JAMIE KLEIN**

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Michelisz's Saturday win from Azcona set him up nicely for World Tour title

## Michelisz crowned as Huff is foiled

**MACAU GUIA**  
**MACAU (CHN)**  
**18-19 NOVEMBER**  
**TCR WORLD TOUR ROUND 9/9**

Norbert Michelisz secured the inaugural TCR World Tour title in the Macau Guia season finale. The Hyundai driver cruised from pole to victory in race one, while rivals Yann Ehrlacher and Rob Huff both hit trouble over the two races.

The Hyundai Elantras showed incredible pace in qualifying, with Mikel Azcona topping the first session, before Michelisz broke the TCR lap record in the top 12 Q2 shootout. The drama started at the end of qualifying: Azcona went second quickest before cruising back to the pitlane, and Huff, behind him on his fast lap, lost time when he caught the Spaniard at the Melco hairpin. A frustrated Huff aborted his lap and vented at Azcona, who later received a three-place grid penalty for blocking, in parc ferme. This promoted Ehrlacher to second, with Huff starting from fourth.

Ehrlacher's title challenge effectively ended when his Lynk & Co bogged down at the start and he dropped to 10th,

with the Honda of Nestor Girolami now second, chased by Huff and Azcona.

The race was devoid of safety cars, with Huff fighting to hold back a clearly faster Azcona each lap. Azcona made three attempts to go around the outside of Huff's Comtoyout Audi at Lisboa, the two rubbing together on his second attempt as Huff coaxed the Hyundai towards the tyre barriers. Azcona was forced to lift off and slotted in behind, with Huff holding onto third to the finish.

Michelisz's win gave him a commanding lead in the points going into Sunday's second race, which he was starting from 10th on the reversed grid, while his rivals needed a strong finish to stop him.

The two Lynk & Cos of Santiago Urrutia and Thed Bjork started from the front row, but Huff's team-mate Frederic Vervisch split them at the start, while Huff also had a good launch to move up from sixth to fourth and was chasing down Bjork.

The race was held behind the safety car for two incidents on the opening lap: Paul Poon's Audi hit the rear of the stalled Hyundai of Lo Sze Ho at the start; then Ben Bargwanna lost control at Mandarin



Vervisch took victory on his Audi farewell

ALL PICS: MACAU GRAND PRIX

### WEEKEND WINNERS

**TCR WORLD TOUR**  
**MACAU (CHN)**

**Race 1** Norbert Michelisz  
 BRC (Hyundai Elantra N)

**Race 2** Frederic Vervisch  
 Comtoyout (Audi RS3 LMS II)



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and smashed into the barriers, destroying his Peugeot 308.

The race resumed with Vervisch and Huff hounding the Lynk & Cos of Urrutia and Bjork respectively, while the Hyundais had backed off and were clearly running a conservative race behind, waiting for the trouble to unfold. This materialised on lap eight of 11: Vervisch darted past Urrutia for the lead into Mandarin, before Huff overtook Bjork at Lisboa. Now all Huff had to do was get ahead of Urrutia; team-mate Vervisch would then surely pull aside, allowing Huff his 12th win at Macau as well as the TCR World Tour title.

Urrutia then appeared to slow down at Dona Maria, and Huff collected his rear. The Audi's bonnet flipped up onto the windscreen, forcing Huff to pit. The title was over for him, and eighth place was enough for Michelisz to lift the crown.

Bjork allowed Ehrlacher through to take third, while Vervisch went on to claim his second Guia victory in his final outing as an Audi factory driver. It was his first victory of the season at the final furlong.

**NEIL HUDSON**



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## Di Giannantonio makes his point as Martin gets 'tired'

**MOTOGP**  
**LOSAIL (QAT)**  
**19 NOVEMBER**  
**ROUND 19/20**

One way or another, tyres are threatening to have a massive bearing on the outcome of the 2023 MotoGP world title. And that is a bad thing. If it's not the threat of both Francesco Bagnaia and Jorge Martin being hit with a time penalty for riding underneath the mandated minimum tyre pressures, it's the possibility that one of them could be lumbered with a duff option.

In the sprint at the Qatar Grand Prix, Bagnaia saw his first match point slip away from him when problems with his rear tyre meant he struggled to fifth, while Martin put in an imperious display for his eighth half-distance race win of the season. That

cut the championship gap between them down to seven points and ensured a final round showdown at Valencia for the crown. But in the GP, literally from the off, it was clear that Martin was battling the same rear tyre problems Bagnaia had 24 hours earlier.

As his Pramac Ducati snapped when his rear tyre failed to find traction, Martin plummeted from Bagnaia's side in fifth down to eighth at Turn 1, while his factory Ducati rival shot into the lead. The Bagnaia we had all expected to see turned up for the GP and led for the first 18 laps of the 22, albeit never comfortably. When Gresini Ducati rider Fabio Di Giannantonio broke through to second on lap five, he ensured that Bagnaia's lead never exceeded 0.6 seconds.

On lap 18, Di Giannantonio was given a 'mapping 8' message on his dashboard.

In 2017, this was a direct team order from Ducati issued to Jorge Lorenzo to inform him that Andrea Dovizioso, who was fighting for the title, was behind. Ducati maintains that it is not operating any factory orders among its riders. And as it turned out, that remains true.

Gresini needed a way to tell Di Giannantonio that he only had five laps to go and, if he was in a position to fight for the win he felt was possible when he arrived in Qatar, now was the time to get a shift on.

On lap 19, the Gresini rider threw his Ducati up the inside of Bagnaia into Turn 12. Bagnaia attempted a retaliation, but Di Giannantonio closed the line expertly. In a flash, Bagnaia's championship lead over the struggling Martin went from 25 to 21. But it almost crumbled to one.

Bagnaia reeled in Di Giannantonio as they ran into Turn 1 to start lap 20, but the factory Ducati rider got sucked into the slipstream and almost slammed into the back of the leader. Luckily, Losail's miles of run-off area and his healthy 5.3s gap to the chasing Luca Marini saved his evening.

Bagnaia was "scared" for the final two laps. Di Giannantonio was exultant. With a place on the MotoGP grid for 2024 looking very unlikely now, this may well be the Italian sophomore's only chance of standing atop a premier class podium. Certainly, it was the only thing he could have done to have any hope of securing a ride for next year.

Almost 15s behind MotoGP's newest



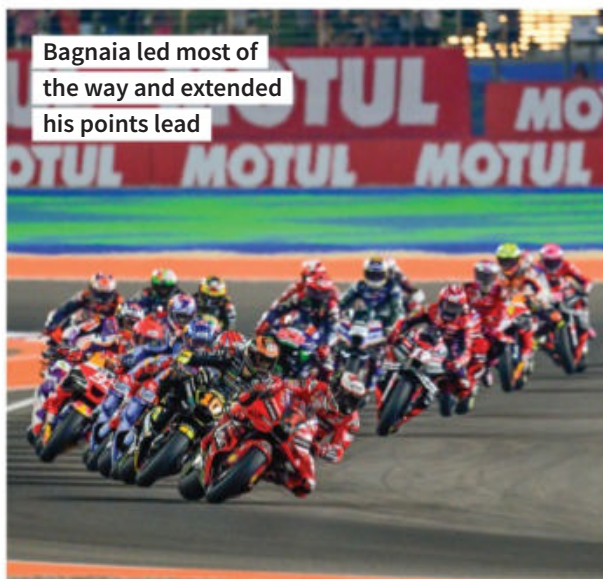
ALL PICS: GOLD AND GOOSE  
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**IMAGES**

Title contender Martin won the sprint race but slumped to 10th in GP





A first win for Di Giannantonio.  
Will it also be his last in MotoGP?



Bagnaia led most of  
the way and extended  
his points lead

**RESULTS ROUND 19/20, LOSAIL (QAT), 19 NOVEMBER (22 LAPS – 73.545 MILES)**

POS	RIDER	TEAM	TIME
1	<b>Fabio Di Giannantonio</b> (ITA)	Gresini Ducati	41m43.654s
2	<b>Francesco Bagnaia</b> (ITA)	Ducati	+2.734s
3	<b>Luca Marini</b> (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+4.408s
4	<b>Maverick Vinales</b> (ESP)	Aprilia	+4.488s
5	<b>Brad Binder</b> (ZAF)	KTM	+7.246s
6	<b>Alex Marquez</b> (ESP)	Gresini Ducati	+7.620s
7	<b>Fabio Quartararo</b> (FRA)	Yamaha	+7.828s
8	<b>Enea Bastianini</b> (ITA)	Ducati	+8.239s
9	<b>Jack Miller</b> (AUS)	KTM	+11.509s
10	<b>Jorge Martin</b> (ESP)	Pramac Ducati	+14.819s
11	<b>Marc Marquez</b> (ESP)	Honda	+14.964s
12	<b>Johann Zarco</b> (FRA)	Pramac Ducati	+17.431s
13	<b>Marco Bezzecchi</b> (ITA)	VR46 Ducati	+17.807s
14	<b>Joan Mir</b> (ESP)	Honda	+18.673s
15	<b>Augusto Fernandez</b> (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	+21.455s
16	<b>Franco Morbidelli</b> (ITA)	Yamaha	+21.474s
17	<b>Raul Fernandez</b> (ESP)	RNF Aprilia	+22.142s
18	<b>Pol Espargaro</b> (ESP)	Tech3 KTM	+27.194s
19	<b>Takaaki Nakagami</b> (JPN)	LCR Honda	+27.740s
R	<b>Alex Espargaro</b> (ESP)	Aprilia	6 laps-injury
R	<b>Iker Lecuona</b> (ESP)	LCR Honda	0 laps-technical
NS	<b>Miguel Oliveira</b> (PRT)	RNF Aprilia	injury

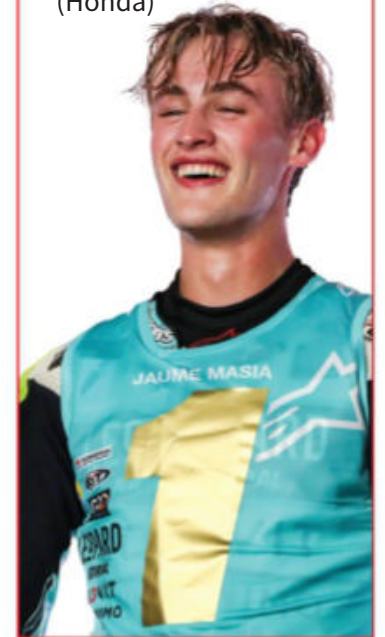
**WEEKEND WINNERS**

**MOTO2**  
**FERMIN ALDEGUER**

Speed Up Racing  
(Boscoscuro)

**MOTO 3**  
**JAUME MASIA**

(below)  
Leopard Racing  
(Honda)



**Winner's average speed** 105.750mph. **Fastest lap** Bastianini 1m52.978s, 106.522mph.

**QUALIFYING 2** 1 Marini 1m51.762s; 2 Di Giannantonio 1m51.829s; 3 A Marquez 1m51.898s; 4 Bagnaia 1m52.036s; 5 Martin 1m52.058s; 6 Zarco 1m52.101s; 7 M Marquez 1m52.103s; 8 Vinales 1m52.175s; 9 R Fernandez 1m52.348s; 10 A Espargaro 1m52.466s; 11 Binder 1m52.729s; 12 A Fernandez 1m52.784s.

**QUALIFYING 1** Zarco 1m52.382s; A Marquez 1m52.437s; 13 Bezzecchi 1m52.504s; 14 Quartararo 1m52.524s; 15 Bastianini 1m52.828s; 16 Miller 1m52.889s; 17 Oliveira 1m53.099s; 18 Morbidelli 1m53.143s; 19 P Espargaro 1m53.362s; 20 Mir 1m53.570s; 21 Lecuona 1m53.838s; 22 Nakagami 1m54.360s.

**SPRINT RACE** (11 LAPS – 36.773 MILES)

1 Martin 20m52.634s; 2 Di Giannantonio +0.391s; 3 Marini +2.875s; 4 A Marquez +3.370s; 5 Bagnaia +3.957s; 6 Vinales +4.239s; 7 Binder +5.761s; 8 Quartararo +6.454s; 9 A Fernandez +8.285s; 10 Zarco +8.314s; 11 M Marquez +9.596s; 12 Miller +10.173s; 13 Bezzecchi +10.646s; 14 R Fernandez +11.117s; 15 Morbidelli +12.163s; 16 P Espargaro +12.745s; 17 Lecuona +19.285s; 18 Nakagami +26.238s; 19 Mir +28.446s; 20 Bastianini +35.553s; R A Espargaro 1 lap-accident; R Oliveira 0 laps-accident. **Winner's average speed** 105.682mph. **Fastest lap** Martin 1m53.355s, 106.168mph.

**RIDERS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 Bagnaia 437; 2 Martin 416; 3 Bezzecchi 326; 4 Binder 268; 5 Zarco 204; 6 A Espargaro 198; 7 Marini 194; 8 Vinales 192; 9 Quartararo 167; 10 A Marquez 165.

**CONSTRUCTORS' CHAMPIONSHIP** 1 Ducati 663; 2 KTM 348; 3 Aprilia 309; 4 Yamaha 187; 5 Honda 174.

winner finished Martin. His miserable race culminated in 10th, his deficit to Bagnaia in the standings now 21 points. Martin didn't hold back after the race, slamming Michelin (not by name, it must be noted) for what he sees as 'stealing' the title from him through a defective rear tyre. As Autosport went to press, Michelin was still investigating the issue.

With just 37 points up for grabs now in 2023, Bagnaia could win a second world title in this Saturday's sprint at Valencia.

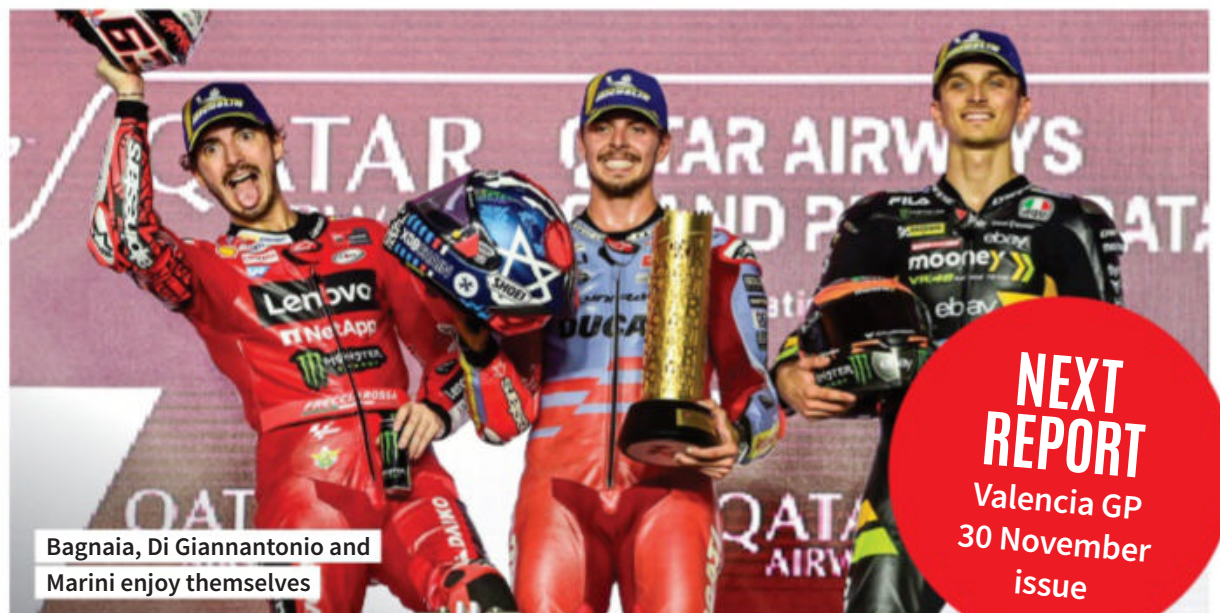
Luca Marini completed the Qatar podium for VR46 after starting from pole, as he looks near to a Honda switch for 2024, while Marc Marquez – the rider he will replace – slid to 11th in yet another grand prix where he made the RC213V look more credible than it actually is for much of it.

Maverick Vinales upheld Aprilia honour in fourth ahead of KTM's Brad Binder and the Gresini Ducati of Alex Marquez. Fabio Quartararo's quiet ride to seventh warranted praise under the Yamaha's usual deficiencies.

Current and former Bagnaia team-mates did him a favour in eighth and ninth, with Enea Bastianini and KTM's Jack Miller adding to Martin's misery in the latter stages of the grand prix by demoting him.

Pramac still came away from Qatar with the teams' championship, though Sunday's events have seemingly made the crown it really craves almost unattainable as 2023 draws to its conclusion.

**LEWIS DUNCAN**



Bagnaia, Di Giannantonio and Marini enjoy themselves

**NEXT REPORT**  
Valencia GP  
30 November  
issue







WEC

# TOYOTA WINS MOST BATTLES BUT MISSES THE BIG ONE

*The Japanese manufacturer remained the team to beat as the new golden era properly got going, but it was Ferrari that won at Le Mans*

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY JEP  motorsport  
IMAGES



**H**umility. That was a word off on the lips of the newcomers to the World Endurance Championship's Hypercar class as the much-vaunted golden era of sportscar racing began in earnest. They would stay humble, insisted Ferrari, Porsche *et al* as they took on Toyota, the acknowledged king of the series. Prescient words they were, because the Japanese manufacturer swept all before it, winning six out of seven rounds. The one exception, however, was the race that truly mattered.

Ferrari's victory at the Le Mans 24 Hours was the story of the season. It wasn't just that the most prestigious sportscar marque of them all triumphed in the centenary running of the French enduro on its comeback with a factory prototype after 50 years, nor that it was a thrilling race worthy of the occasion. Le Mans was a hinge in the narrative of the season.

The Balance of Performance, one of the essential building blocks of the top class of the WEC, underscored a plot line that went something like this. A new BoP system is introduced for 2023; it clearly favours an established player in the series and is then unilaterally changed for the important race in the summer because the powers that be aren't happy that Toyota is dominating; Ferrari wins the Big One, and then gets pegged back straight afterwards and Toyota continues on its winning way. >>



Ferrari's single victory came in the Big One





#7 Toyota won four times but missed title

**“THAT DIDN’T STOP TOYOTA BIG BOSS AKIO TOYODA PROCLAIMING THAT ‘WE LOST TO POLITICS’”**



Cadillac proved strong at Le Mans and took third

That’s the simplified version. The end result was that Toyota waltzed to 1-2 in the points and a fifth straight drivers’ and manufacturers’ points double. Sebastien Buemi, Brendon Hartley and Ryo Hidakawa won two races to the four of team-mates Kamui Kobayashi, Mike Conway and Jose Maria Lopez, yet retained their title by 27 points.

Toyota barely looked like losing victory at any of the regular six or eight-hour rounds. Margins of two laps at Sebring and one in the Algarve proved too big for the rulemakers. The FIA and the Automobile Club de l’Ouest described the changes as a “correction” because the performance differentials between the Le Mans Hypercar machinery from Toyota, Ferrari and Peugeot had been “greater than initially anticipated”. It sounded like code for “Toyota is too successful and/or fast”.

There was no scope to change the balance between the Toyota and the Ferrari, or any of the other Le Mans Hypercars, prior to Le Mans in the latest guidelines as written. The new system was based on simulation and an assessment of each car’s potential, with one of the key aims being the removal of any encouragement to sandbag. There was now nothing to gain by holding back in the early-season races to get a favourable BoP for Le Mans. Only the so-called platform BoP, the balance between the LMHs and the newly arrived LMDh machinery from Cadillac and Porsche, could change before the French classic, and then only once after two races. Wider changes to what was known as the manufacturer BoP were due to come only after Le Mans.

Any change outside of the new system in theory should have needed the unanimous agreement of the participants, which was never likely to be forthcoming given that a platform change for Spa appears to have been shouted down. So the FIA and the ACO just changed the BoP anyway.

The ACO got what it wanted, needed even, on its big occasion, a sell-out event. It got the ‘right’ winner in a Ferrari 499P Le Mans Hypercar, the #51 car driven by James Calado, Alessandro Pier Guidi and Antonio Giovinazzi, as well as a classic race that went down to the wire. Each of the five major car makers now represented in Hypercar led, while Ferrari and Toyota battled into the penultimate hour.

For all the controversy about Ferrari’s win and the helping hand it received, the race could easily have gone the other way. The #8 Toyota GR010 HYBRID LMH of Buemi, Hartley and Hidakawa was moving in on the winning Ferrari in the closing stages – the track appeared to be coming to Toyota. Hartley had closed to within nine seconds before handing over to Hidakawa for the run to the flag. The Japanese driver was then caught out by a brake balance that had been wound rearwards. Damage in the resulting spin at Arnage was relatively light, but Toyota’s challenge was over. Hidakawa crossed the line 80s in arrears.

That was significantly less than the 2m30s that Toyota Gazoo Racing Europe technical director Pascal Vasselon reckoned the

**ROUND BY ROUND**

**Sebring 1000 Miles**

**Hypercar** Kobayashi/Conway/Lopez  
**LMP2** Stevens/Ye/Beckmann  
**GTE Am** Keating/Varrone/Catsburg  
 Toyota dominates after pole-winner Ferrari’s challenge quickly fades. The Japanese cars still put on a show in a thrilling race in which the gap in seconds can be measured in single digits most of the way. Ferrari takes the final podium spot with #50 in which Fuoco tops qualifying, albeit two laps down after an early safety car results in a poor strategy choice.

**Portimao 6 Hours**

**Hypercar** Buemi/Hartley/Hidakawa  
**LMP2** Jarvis/van der Garde/Pierson  
**GTE Am** Keating/Varrone/Catsburg  
 The #8 Toyota comes from behind following a conservative start to dominate after the sister car hits early problems and limps home ninth following issues with a mandatory torque sensor. The #50 Ferrari takes the runner-up spot a lap down, while Porsche gets onto the podium for the first time. The spot would have gone to the Caddy but for a lock-up entering the pits.

**Spa 6 Hours**

**Hypercar** Kobayashi/Conway/Lopez  
**LMP2** Kubica/Deletraz/Andrade  
**GTE Am** Rovera/Wadoux/  
**Perez Companc**  
 Toyota makes it three in a row, effectively sealing a 1-2 over the first half of a race that starts on a damp track and is interrupted by four safety cars: #7 dominates while #8 storms from the back after Hartley crashes in qualifying. Ferrari is the quicker car over the final three hours, and Calado snatches third on the final lap from one of the Porsches.

**Le Mans 24 Hours**

**Hypercar** Calado/Pier Guidi/Giovinazzi  
**LMP2** Costa/Scherer/Smiechowski  
**GTE Am** Keating/Varrone/Catsburg  
 Ferrari claims a 1-2 in qualifying and then prevails in the race – the 499P is a clear beneficiary of the pre-event BoP changes. It’s a classic confrontation that could go either way; the #8 Toyota is closing in during the penultimate hour when Hidakawa spins. Cadillac fills out the final spot on the podium with its regular WEC car, while Peugeot stars in mixed conditions during the night.



Hirakawa, Hartley and Buemi retained their Hypercar crown



BoP changes cost the GR010 over the 24 hours. It would be overly simplistic to say that Ferrari won as a result of the BoP revisions, because the top two each encountered minor delays through the race. But that didn't stop Toyota big boss Akio Toyoda proclaiming that "we lost to politics".

The one-time major BoP change affecting all the manufacturers came on schedule after Le Mans and ahead of Monza in July. Ferrari was undoubtedly a loser. Antonio Fuoco, Nicklas Nielsen and Miguel Molina finished second on home ground in the #50 499P, though the slender 16s margin to the winning Toyota owed much to three safety cars. That would be as close as Ferrari would get to another victory.

Was the revised BoP for the Ferrari an admission by the rulemakers that they'd got it wrong at Le Mans? Or perhaps they got it all too right with exactly the result they wanted. It was easy to be cynical about the BoP machinations this season.

For all the finger pointing and Toyota's domination of the regular races, it is important to remember that the GR010 was the proven car in the field. Ergo it was going to be the closest to its potential. This was its third season, and it had undergone a second significant upgrade under the 'evo joker' rules that put strict limits on development during the lifecycle of a Hypercar contender.

The revisions for 2023 were aimed at making the GR010 a more 'raceable' machine. It certainly was that in comparison with the rest of the field. Where it really scored over its rivals, Ferrari included, was in consistency through a double stint on a set of

Michelin tyres, which now couldn't be pre-heated before going on the car. (It was a controversial rule change that was reversed for one race only at Le Mans after an outcry post-Spa following a spate of accidents in cold and damp conditions.)

Tyre degradation is always less of a factor around Le Mans; much of the 8.47-mile Circuit de la Sarthe is made up of straights, remember. Ferrari was never a match for Toyota in this department, and certainly never hid its struggles. A levelling of the playing field in this respect was undoubtedly a significant factor in Ferrari's victory at Le Mans.

Ferrari and its AF Corse factory team left France looking like it might be able to mount a bid for the championship. Calado and his team-mates in #51 were only 25 points behind the drivers of the #8 Toyota. That challenge never materialised, and they slipped behind the sister car in the final reckoning after #50 put Ferrari back on the podium in Bahrain following the team's only race without silverware at Fuji.

A challenge from Kobayashi, Conway and Lopez did materialise, even though they reckoned their chances were slim after heading into the final three races 41 points in arrears following a non-finish at Le Mans when the Japanese driver received a double hit from behind in a confused lead-up to an 80km/h Slow Zone. So much of a long shot did it look that Conway, pre-Monza, was talking about having to play a back-up role to help the drivers in #8.

It didn't turn out like that. Back-to-back wins for the Brit and his team-mates along with a series of problems for #8 in Italy gave a >>

### Monza 6 Hours

**Hypercar** Kobayashi/Conway/Lopez

**LMP2** Fittipaldi/Rasmussen/  
Heinemeier Hansson

**GTE Am** Andlauer/Pedersen/Ried

Ferrari finishes only 16.5s away from Toyota, which is back on top after the post-Le Mans BoP changes. Only the safety car keeps it close between #7 and #50, while the second GR010 ends up sixth after three penalties. Porsche #5 has a sniff of a podium but drops back with a late splash, before promotion to fourth after #8 and #51 are penalised post-race.

### Fuji 6 Hours

**Hypercar** Kobayashi/Conway/Lopez

**LMP2** Kubica/Deletraz/Andrade

**GTE Am** Rigon/Castellacci/Flohr

Another 1-2 yields a manufacturers' title for Toyota on home ground, an amazing double from Kobayashi at the end sealing the victory and an outside shot at the drivers' title. The headlines are made by Porsche, its #6 car leading for four hours. Only a refuelling issue blunts its shot at second. Ferrari endures its least competitive race of the season on the way to fourth and fifth.

### Bahrain 8 Hours

**Hypercar** Buemi/Hartley/Hirakawa

**LMP2** Kubica/Deletraz/Andrade

**GTE Am** Bovy/Gatting/Frey

The drivers of the #8 Toyota seal the title with a second victory of 2023 under little threat from their team-mates: #7 is tipped into a spin at the start and then runs into torque sensor issues. Ferrari is back on the podium behind the Toyotas with #50 after winning out in a battle with the Jota customer Porsche. Cadillac's high hopes are derailed by a first-corner lock-up by Bamber.







Jota proved a privateer can compete at the front as Porsche 963 improved

crew that was generally the faster of the two at Toyota a sniff of the title heading for the Bahrain finale. The scent became that little bit fainter after qualifying, when pole for Hartley meant the championship leaders only had to finish third to retain their crown in the event of #7 winning. When Conway was tipped into a spin at the first corner by Earl Bamber's locked-up Cadillac, the destination of the title seemed set.

A statistic more telling than the 4-2 win tally in favour of #7 was the number of major delays that left a Toyota down the order at the finish: two for #7 and one for #8. In addition to the Le Mans retirement, the runners-up were hit in Portugal by a problem with one of the driveshaft torque sensors mandated by the rule-makers. Toyota had to cut power dramatically to keep the car within the prescribed torque curve. The car could only trail home ninth.

New protocols were introduced as a result, which meant that

**“PORSCHE ENDURED A DIFFICULT START TO 2023. THE 963 WAS NEITHER QUICK NOR RELIABLE”**



Glickenhaas bowed out with head held high

when the problem reoccurred for #7 in Bahrain the performance drop was not nearly so significant. That a problem that had never before reared its head in a race for Toyota should reoccur on #7 was indicative of its drivers' luck in 2023.

It would be wrong to say, however, that #7 had a monopoly on misfortune within the Toyota camp. The sister car was penalised three times at Monza – two driving infractions for Buemi, only one of which looked merited, and then an addition of 50s post-race when the car was found to have gone over the maximum permissible power output. There was also the pitstop that coincided with a Full Course Yellow that arguably cost them victory at Sebring.

Next best after Toyota and Ferrari over the full season was Cadillac with its solo V-Series.R LMDh entered by Chip Ganassi Racing and driven by Earl Bamber, Alex Lynn and Richard Westbrook. The American car was definitely number three in the Hypercar pecking order at the start of the season, and wasn't far off the podium in either of the first two races.

The highlight of the season for what was largely an all-new team operating out of Germany came at Le Mans, where Bamber and co finished third, only a lap down on the top two. It would have been closer but for lubrication problems that required a top-up of oil at every stop from as early as the third hour.

Caddy might have been in the fight with Ferrari and Toyota at Le Mans, though. The extra Ganassi entry that crossed over from the IMSA SportsCar Championship for the French enduro was among the very quickest in the hands of Sebastien Bourdais. Only what might be described as a messy race limited the car he shared with Renger van der Zande and Scott Dixon to fourth.

Cadillac's season went off the boil after Le Mans. It looked like there might be a return to form at the season finale: Lynn qualified third, and he and his team-mates appeared well placed to take advantage of the way the car looked after its tyres, one of its key strengths, only for Bamber to get it wrong at the first corner.

Porsche endured a difficult start to the season with its 963. The thing was neither quick nor reliable at the get-go. There was a podium at the second time of asking in the WEC for Laurens Vanthoor, Kevin Estre and Andre Lotterer at the Portimao 6 Hours that owed more to the high rate of attrition than its pace, and then flashes of speed during a difficult Le Mans. It wasn't until after the two-month break between Monza and Fuji that the Porsche Penske Motorsport factory team appeared to have turned the corner.

The US squad with a European base in Germany appeared to have overcome the braking instability that was at the root of its woes. The #6 car led for four hours in Japan, thanks in part to a



chaotic first corner and a cheekily opportunistic move from Vanthoor. Had there not been a refuelling glitch – described as an operational issue – after the pre-grid reconnaissance laps that enforced some drastic fuel saving by its drivers, they might have got in among the Toyotas.

A Porsche was in the fight for another podium in Bahrain, but this time it was the customer Jota car shared by Antonio Felix da Costa, Will Stevens and Yifei Ye. Jota got its 963 in time for Spa in April, and then held Porsche to its promise that a customer car could be a match for the works machines. Ye was outstanding at Le Mans in mixed conditions on Saturday evening, admittedly before overstepping and going off. Fourth in the final race was further proof that an independent can now challenge the might of the factories. Proton Competition, which debuted its 963 at Monza, showed flashes of form, too.

Glickenhuis Racing did both of those things in 2022, witness its Le Mans podium but, against more manufacturers and with a car that undertook not a single testing mile between seasons, it wasn't a contender this time. What Glickenhuis did do, however, was get both its Pipo-engined 007 LMHs to the finish at the 24 Hours, and in sixth and seventh positions ahead of Porsche and Peugeot. Not bad for an impecunious *garagiste*, reckoned team boss Jim Glickenhuis, who has now called time on his WEC involvement.

The ByKolles team, now competing as Vanwall Racing, debuted its Vandervell 680 after getting a WEC entry at the second time of asking. The minnow of the Hypercar field hardly distinguished itself in terms of pace or reliability, though it has to be said that the car was beautifully made. The team could never get the power it was allowed under the BoP out of its normally aspirated V8, and will swap to an undisclosed turbo engine for its projected 2024 campaign.

## WRT on top as LMP2 bids farewell

LMP2 bowed out of the WEC in 2023 – it will only be back for Le Mans from now on – and WRT bowed out of P2 ahead of its move to the Hypercar ranks with BMW. It did so with style, regaining the world title it had won in 2021. Champions Robert Kubica, Louis Deletraz and Rui Andrade won three times and only once finished off the podium.

None of their rivals in the 11-car field had anything approaching such a consistent season. In fact, no other driver combination won more than once or scored more than three podiums. Kubica and Deletraz, in their third season together, were always among the fastest in class. Andrade wasn't necessarily among the quickest of the Silver drivers mandated in each car line-up, but the Angolan was a solid performer who didn't make mistakes.

Some good fortune inevitably went the way of the champions and their ORECA-Gibson 07. They sealed the title with a win in Bahrain when victory should have gone to team-mates Robin Frijns, Ferdinand Habsburg and Sean Gelael. A seized wheelnut lost them victory at the final pitstop. United Autosports would tell you that it could or should have beaten Kubica, Deletraz and Andrade at Fuji after its two cars led all bar 20 of the 219 laps.

On the other hand, the WRT drivers might say that they were unlucky at Le Mans. And did. They were among those who pointed an accusing finger at the Polish Inter Europol squad that claimed victory ahead of them with Albert Costa, Fabio Scherer and Jakub Smiechowski. The accusers argued that the remarkable thing about the victory was not Scherer driving through the pain of a fracture and ligament damage in his foot, sustained when he was hit by another car in the pitlane, but by the acceleration and fuel consumption of the Inter Europol ORECA. Nothing untoward was ever found, but the investigation by the FIA and the ACO lasted into July. The 50 points secured at Le Mans was a big contribution to a score that gave Costa, Scherer and Smiechowski second in the class points at the season's end.

United Autosports endured torrid bad luck in its unsuccessful attempt to win back the title it claimed in 2019-20. A loose in-car camera that pushed the kill switch into the off position on the ORECA shared by Tom Blomqvist, Oliver Jarvis and Josh Pierson when leading at Sebring set the tone for the season. They were dominating proceedings at the time the car was stranded.

United scored its only win in the Algarve with Jarvis, Pierson and Giedo van der Garde when Blomqvist was on IMSA duty. Filipe Albuquerque, Phil Hanson and Freddie Lubin took a maximum at Sebring after finishing second to the Jota ORECA of Stevens, Ye and David Beckmann, which ran in the first two races prior to the arrival of the team's Porsche and wasn't eligible for points. >>



WRT crew topped  
another quality  
LMP2 field





Iron Dames finally got deserved win in Bahrain

### Corvette crew cruise to GTE Am crown

Corvette Racing stayed on in the WEC after its maiden full-season campaign in 2022 in the last year of GTE Pro. It made sense to continue in GTE Am to keep a foot in the camp and to learn about working with customers in advance of the arrival of its Z06 GT3.R in 2024. There should be no surprise that its full factory team dominated proceedings, and it helped that it had by far and away the best drivers.

Ben Keating was consistently the best Bronze-rated driver, just as he had been in seasons past. WEC newcomer Nico Varrone was on average the best Silver, so much so that he's now been upgraded to Gold and landed himself a Chevrolet factory deal. The undoubted talents of Nicky Catsburg, the pro in the line-up, were barely a talking point over the course of the season. His team-mates, who generally drove before him, did much of the heavy lifting. The Dutchman was, however, exceptional when he needed to be, Le Mans included.

The Corvette won the opening two races, finished second at Spa, and then gave Keating a second straight Le Mans class win. Fourth place at Monza was enough to give him and his team-mates the title with two races to run.

Corvette's major rival was the Iron Dames line-up of Michelle Gattling, Rahel Frey and Sarah Bovy, especially when it came to qualifying. Keating or Bovy won the qualifying battle fought out by the Bronze drivers in six of the seven races. The all-female crew in the Porsche 911 RSR run by Iron Lynx was unable to convert its qualifying form into a race win until the Bahrain finale. Even then a belated victory for the crew in the last ever race for cars built to the GTE rules owed much to the misfortune encountered by the TF/D'Station and NorthWest AMR/Heart of Racing Aston Martin Vantage GTEs that finished second and third.

Consistent finishing on the part of the Iron Dames was enough to give them second in the points ahead of Thomas Flohr, Davide Rigon and Francesco Castellacci, who took the victory laurels at Fuji aboard their AF Corse Ferrari 488 GTE. ❄️

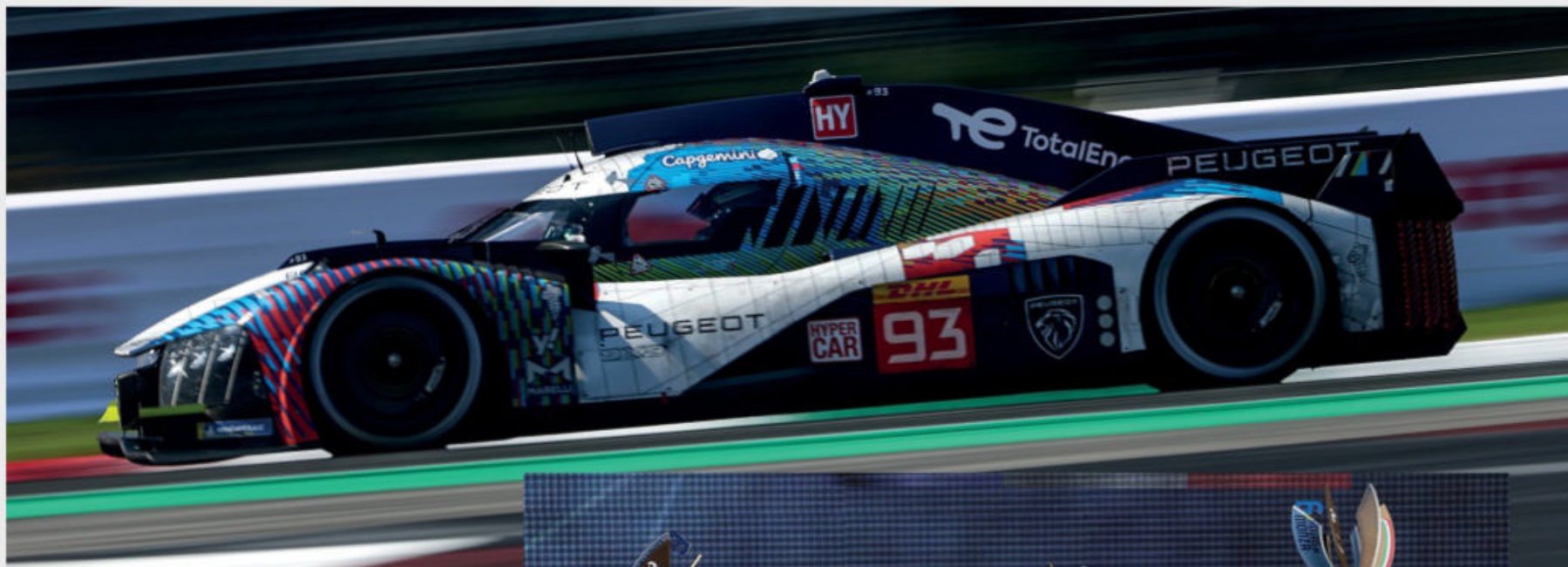
**“KEATING WAS CONSISTENTLY THE BEST BRONZE-RATED DRIVER, AS HE WAS IN SEASONS PAST”**



Corvette squad set the benchmark in GTE and clinched title early



## PEUGEOT FORCED TO CHANGE CONCEPT



Peugeot began the season with an abject performance at the Sebring 1000 Miles and ended it with the announcement over the weekend of the Bahrain finale that it was giving up on the avant-garde concept of the 9X8 LMH. In between times there were flashes of promise – a starring performance at Le Mans and a podium at Monza – but the conclusion reached by the French manufacturer was that the car as it stood couldn't be competitive on a consistent basis.

The near-50/50 weight distribution and the same size wheels and tyres all round that allowed it to opt against running a conventional rear wing put the traction-limited car at a disadvantage at all but the quickest circuits. The Balance of Performance never fully came to its rescue, even when the front axle minimum deployment speed was reduced from 150km/h (around 90mph) to 135km/h for Fuji and Bahrain in the post-Le Mans BoP. It simply wasn't enough to compensate for having less rubber on the road at the rear.

It is incorrect to say that Peugeot got it wrong. When it started work on the 9X8 it had to be designed around the 31cm-wide tyres as per the original LMH regulations. That changed as part of the convergence process to align the performance of LMH and LMDh machinery. Toyota successfully argued that the late reduction of the minimum weight for LMH from 1080kg to 1040kg for a four-wheel-drive car compromised the weight distribution of the GR010. It was allowed to swap to the 29/34 option for 2022. The 9X8 was already in build



**“AT FUJI AND BAHRAIN  
THE 9X8 WAS NOWHERE.  
A DECISION TO CHANGE  
TACK WAS INEVITABLE”**

when the decision came.

The 9X8 had shown signs of promise over the three races it contested post-Le Mans in 2022, but it was nowhere around the bumpy Sebring International Raceway. Worse still, both cars were in trouble early doors. A problem with the gearshift actuation that had been identified over the winter hit both cars in

the space of an hour. A fix – a move from electric to hydraulic activation – was already in the pipeline and came on stream for Portimao.

The Portuguese race was probably Peugeot's third best race of the season, though the 9X8 wasn't anything approaching competitive until Le Mans. The car starred in the mixed conditions of the first half of the race, the #94 car shared by Gustavo Menezes, Loic Duval and Nico Muller leading the race and running in the top three for a protracted period until the first-named went off.

The sister #93 car driven by Paul di Resta, Jean-Eric Vergne and Mikkel Jensen looked good for a top-five until problems with the power steering and front splitter intervened in the closing stages. This crew notched up the 9X8's first and so far only podium (above) at Monza after the post-Le Mans BoP on another occasion that Peugeot led a race.

On the Fuji and Bahrain circuits, where slow corners proliferate, the 9X8 was nowhere again. The decision to change tack was inevitable.







**HYPERCAR WORLD ENDURANCE DRIVERS' CHAMPIONSHIP**

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM / CAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	PTS
1	<b>Brendon Hartley</b> (NZL) <b>Ryo Hirakawa</b> (JPN) <b>Sebastien Buemi</b> (CHE)	Toyota Gazoo Racing / Toyota GR010 HYBRID	2	1	2	2	6	2	1	172
2	<b>Jose Maria Lopez</b> (ARG) <b>Kamui Kobayashi</b> (JPN) <b>Mike Conway</b> (GBR)	Toyota Gazoo Racing / Toyota GR010 HYBRID	1	9	1	R	1	1	2	145
3	<b>Antonio Fuoco</b> (ITA) <b>Miguel Molina</b> (ESP) <b>Nicklas Nielsen</b> (DNK)	Ferrari AF Corse / Ferrari 499P	3	2	R	5	2	4	3	120
4	<b>Alessandro Pier Guidi</b> (ITA) <b>Antonio Giovinazzi</b> (ITA) <b>James Calado</b> (GBR)	Ferrari AF Corse / Ferrari 499P	7	6	3	1	5	5	6	114
5	<b>Alex Lynn</b> (GBR) <b>Earl Bamber</b> (NZL) <b>Richard Westbrook</b> (GBR)	Cadillac Racing (Ganassi) / Cadillac V-Series.R	4	4	5	3	10	10	11	72
6	<b>Andre Lotterer</b> (DEU) <b>Kevin Estre</b> (FRA) <b>Laurens Vanthoor</b> (BEL)	Porsche Penske Motorsport / Porsche 963	6	3	R	11	7	3	5	71
7	<b>Dane Cameron</b> (USA) <b>Frederic Makowiecki</b> (FRA) <b>Michael Christensen</b> (DNK)	Porsche Penske Motorsport / Porsche 963	5	10	4	9	4	12	7	61
8	<b>Jean-Eric Vergne</b> (FRA) <b>Mikkel Jensen</b> (DNK) <b>Paul di Resta</b> (GBR)	Peugeot TotalEnergies / Peugeot 9X8	9	7	8	8	3	8	9	51
9	<b>Antonio Felix da Costa</b> (PRT) <b>Will Stevens</b> (GBR) <b>Yifei Ye</b> (CHN)	Hertz Team Jota / Porsche 963	-	-	6	13	9	6	4	38
10	<b>Olivier Pla</b> (FRA) <b>Romain Dumas</b> (FRA)	Glickenhaus Racing / Glickenhaus-Pipo 007 LMH	R	8	7	6	8	-	-	34

11 **Gustavo Menezes/Loic Duval** (Peugeot TotalEnergies Peugeot 9X8) 28; 12 **Ryan Briscoe** (Glickenhaus Racing Glickenhaus-Pipo 007 LMH & Floyd Vanwall Racing Team Vanwall Vandervell-Gibson 680) 24; 13 **Nico Muller** (Peugeot TotalEnergies Peugeot 9X8) 22; 14 **Stoffel Vandoorne** (Peugeot TotalEnergies Peugeot 9X8) 6; 15 **Esteban Guerrieri** (Floyd Vanwall Racing Team Vanwall Vandervell-Gibson 680) 6; 16 **Tom Dillmann** (Floyd Vanwall Racing Team Vanwall Vandervell-Gibson 680) 6; 17 **Jacques Villeneuve** (Floyd Vanwall Racing Team Vanwall Vandervell-Gibson 680) 6; 18 **Nathanael Berthon** (Glickenhaus Racing Glickenhaus-Pipo 007 LMH) 4; 19 **Gianmaria Bruni/Harry Tincknell/Neel Jani** (Proton Competition Porsche 963) 4; 20 **Tristan Vautier** (Floyd Vanwall Racing Team Vanwall Vandervell-Gibson 680) 0; 21 **Joao Paulo de Oliveira** (Floyd Vanwall Racing Team Vanwall Vandervell-Gibson 680) 0.

**Manufacturers' championship** 1 Toyota 217; 2 Ferrari 161; 3 Porsche 99; 4 Cadillac 79; 5 Peugeot 67; 6 Glickenhaus 36; 7 Vanwall 10.

**LMP2 ENDURANCE TROPHY**

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM / CAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	PTS
1	<b>Louis Deletraz</b> (CHE) <b>Robert Kubica</b> (POL) <b>Rui Andrade</b> (PRT)	Team WRT / ORECA-Gibson 07	5	3	1	2	3	1	1	173
2	<b>Albert Costa</b> (ESP) <b>Fabio Scherer</b> (CHE) <b>Jakub Smiechowski</b> (POL)	Inter Europol Competition / ORECA-Gibson 07	4	10	3	1	5	9	6	114
3	<b>Freddie Lubin</b> (GBR) <b>Phil Hanson</b> (GBR)	United Autosports / ORECA-Gibson 07	2	2	5	11	6	2	9	104
4	<b>Ferdinand Habsburg</b> (AUT) <b>Robin Frijns</b> (NLD) <b>Sean Gelael</b> (IDN)	Team WRT / ORECA-Gibson 07	7	7	6	5	R	3	2	94
5	<b>Josh Pierson</b> (USA) <b>Oliver Jarvis</b> (GBR)	United Autosports / ORECA-Gibson 07	R	1	2	8	4	4	8	92
6	<b>David Heinemeier Hansson</b> (DNK) <b>Oliver Rasmussen</b> (DNK) <b>Pietro Fittipaldi</b> (BRA)	Jota / ORECA-Gibson 07	6	8	9	13	1	6	3	84
7	<b>Charles Milesi</b> (FRA) <b>Julien Canal</b> (FRA) <b>Matthieu Vaxiviere</b> (FRA)	Alpine Endurance Team (Signatech) / ORECA-Gibson 07	9	9	7	4	2	5	7	83
8	<b>Filipe Albuquerque</b> (PRT)	United Autosports / ORECA-Gibson 07	2	-	5	11	-	2	9	78
9	<b>Daniil Kvyat</b> (RUS) <b>Doriane Pin</b> (FRA)	Prema Racing / ORECA-Gibson 07	3	4	10	R	7	10	5	63
10	<b>Bent Viscaal</b> (NLD) <b>Filip Ugran</b> (ROU)	Prema Racing / ORECA-Gibson 07	8	6	4	16	9	8	4	57

**Teams' champion** #41 Team WRT.

**GTE AM ENDURANCE TROPHY**

POS	DRIVERS	TEAM / CAR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	PTS
1	<b>Ben Keating</b> (USA) <b>Nicky Catsburg</b> (NLD) <b>Nico Varrone</b> (ARG)	Corvette Racing (Pratt & Miller) / Chevrolet Corvette C8.R	1	1	2	1	4	2	7	173
2	<b>Michelle Gatting</b> (DNK) <b>Rahel Frey</b> (CHE) <b>Sarah Bovy</b> (BEL)	Iron Dames (Iron Lynx) / Porsche 911 RSR	8	3	5	4	5	4	1	118
3	<b>Davide Rigon</b> (ITA) <b>Francesco Castellacci</b> (ITA) <b>Thomas Flohr</b> (CHE)	AF Corse / Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	5	4	R	5	10	1	4	91
4	<b>Christian Ried</b> (DEU) <b>Julien Andlauer</b> (FRA) <b>Mikkel Overgaard Pedersen</b> (DNK)	Dempsey-Proton Racing / Porsche 911 RSR	2	7	9	R	1	6	6	80
5	<b>Ahmad Al Harthy</b> (OMN) <b>Charlie Eastwood</b> (GBR) <b>Michael Dinan</b> (USA)	ORT by TF / Aston Martin Vantage GTE	9	8	3	2	7	13	R	65
6	<b>Ben Barker</b> (GBR) <b>Michael Wainwright</b> (GBR) <b>Riccardo Pera</b> (ITA)	GR Racing / Porsche 911 RSR	7	11	12	3	3	8	8	64
7	<b>Takeshi Kimura</b> (JPN)	Kessel Racing / Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	3	10	8	R	R	3	5	58
8	<b>Alessio Rovera</b> (ITA) <b>Lilou Wadoux</b> (FRA) <b>Luis Perez Companc</b> (ARG)	Richard Mille AF Corse / Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	R	2	1	R	6	9	9	56
9	<b>Alex Riberas</b> (ESP) <b>Daniel Mancinelli</b> (ITA) <b>Ian James</b> (GBR)	NorthWestAMR (Prodrive) / Aston Martin Vantage GTE	-	-	7	6	-	7	3	51
10	<b>Scott Huffaker</b> (USA)	Kessel Racing / Ferrari 488 GTE Evo	3	10	8	R	R	3	-	43

**Teams' champion** #33 Corvette Racing.

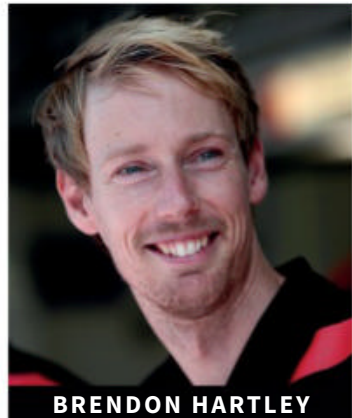


## AUTOSPORT'S TOP 10 HYPERCAR DRIVERS



ANTONIO FUOCO

**1** A first season in the prototype ranks for the Ferrari F1 development driver was nothing short of sensational. He'd already shown he was a future star in GT machinery, and emerged as the quickest of the 499P drivers. Poles at Sebring and Le Mans grabbed the headlines, but it was Fuoco's race pace that gets him the top position. Nowhere was he better than at Le Mans. His shunt out of the pits at Spa is only a minor black mark given the absence of tyre heaters in dreadful conditions.



BRENDON HARTLEY

**2** Another strong season for the Kiwi, in which he was always up there among the fastest Toyota racers, yielded a fourth WEC drivers' title, though he was in the marginally slower of the two cars. Hartley was outstanding at Le Mans, his charge after lunch on Sunday looking like it might extend Toyota's run at the 24 Hours. Pole when the pressure was on in Bahrain shouldn't be overlooked. But his shunt in qualifying at Spa can be: the circumstances were the same as for Fuoco.



LAURENS VANTHOOR

**3** A driver who has pretty much done it all in two codes of GT racing made the switch to prototypes with ease. He was the ace in Porsche's pack in 2023, belying the fact that he'd previously only made a handful of starts in pure-bred sportscar machinery. More often than not the quickest of the six Porsche Penske Motorsport drivers, he was at his best at Fuji. He claimed the lead at the start in opportunistic style and then maintained amazing pace while in aggressive fuel save mode.



KAMUI KOBAYASHI

**4** Another strong season for the Japanese driver while he continued to pull double duty as the talisman driver in #7 and team principal of the WEC squad. Nowhere was he better than on home ground at Fuji: his double stint at the end was breathtaking. Chuck in a trio of poles, and there's nothing to suggest that his wider role at Toyota is in any way taking a toll. Was entirely blameless in the accident at Le Mans that put #7 out and pretty much did for its championship chances.



JAMES CALADO

**5** Another driver to make a smooth transition from GT machinery to prototypes, though an admittedly heavier and more cumbersome breed than LMP1. Calado was a quick and consistent performer over the full season, even if Fuoco was the man for Ferrari at Le Mans and team-mate Giovinazzi shaded him on the averages in the winning car. His best performance of the year came at Spa, where he drove a storming double stint at the end to snatch a podium on the final lap of the race.



SEBASTIEN BUEMI

**6** Buemi bookended his season in 2023 with outstanding drives at Sebring and in Bahrain when he was the quickest among the Toyota crews. It would be wrong to say that he was less convincing in between times, just that there were other drivers in the Japanese camp who were faster. Had a solid rather than stellar Le Mans, but his drive through the field from the back of the pack – after Hartley's qualifying misdemeanour – at Spa in difficult conditions shouldn't be overlooked.



JOSE MARIA LOPEZ

**7** The Argentinian finds himself without a Hypercar drive for next year after getting a season's reprieve this time around. That he was due to be replaced by Nyck de Vries prior to his F1 sojourn had nothing to do with his performances in 2022, just as what he did this year isn't the reason he is now losing his WEC seat after six seasons. It's a shame for a driver who was pretty much on a par with Buemi in 2023; they were the number two performers in their respective entries.



EARL BAMBER

**8** Generally the fastest of the WEC regulars at the Ganassi Cadillac squad, though drivers from the other car crews outpaced him at Le Mans. Third in the 24 Hours was the high point for Bamber, Ganassi and Caddy, though there could and probably should have been more podiums. Sebring was one that got away, when Bamber was at his best. Would have ended up higher but for his first-corner Bahrain gaffe, which cost Ganassi a shot at a first podium in a regular WEC round.



KEVIN ESTRE

**9** The star of Porsche's WEC GT roster took his opportunity in the prototype ranks with both hands. Had some strong performances where he was the quickest Porsche driver, but his best race was Fuji, where he fought a robust rearguard action when caught for the lead by Lopez in the #7 Toyota. He proved equal to the task, so much so that the Japanese make swapped its two cars to let Hirakawa have a go at him. All the more impressive given the fuel saving Estre was having to do.




MICHAEL CHRISTENSEN

**10** The Dane's form in a prototype this year provided the final rehabilitation of a driver who was dropped from the full factory roster at Porsche in 2021. Christensen was usually among the quickest Porsche drivers, including Le Mans where there was only a gnat's whisker between him, Vanthoor and team-mate Frederic Makowiecki. For all his pace, there was no silverware for Christensen, Makowiecki and Dane Cameron in what was the second Porsche in 2023.



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## The Triumph taking on the Escort hordes

Chris Ingram to tackle gruelling Roger Albert Clark Rally in TR7



Tributes to former rising star **Jake Cook**



BTCC drivers enjoy **BriSCA** short oval fun



More details about new **Mini JCW Sport** class



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DRIVEN BY RACING



# Tributes paid to former single-seater star and driver coach Jake Cook

## OBITUARY

Tributes have been paid to Jake Cook, a former star of junior single-seater racing and later a leading driver coach, who has died aged 30.

Cook's family has a long history in the motoring and motorsport world. His grandfather, car dealership king Derek, raced single-seaters, including a Formula 1 Hesketh in the 1977 Shellsport series, while his aunt Paula competed in the British Touring Car Championship and his uncle David won the 1996 Formula Renault UK title.

Cook Jr made an instant impression in his own car racing career, finishing second to Sarah Moore in the 2009 Ginetta Junior standings before making the move to single-seaters in British Formula Ford with Getem Racing. He also won governing body Motor Sports Association's inaugural Young Driver of the Year award for those on its advanced apprenticeship in sporting excellence course. Cook then switched to the leading Jamun squad for 2011 and was a title



Jamun driver was second in British Formula Ford in 2012

JEP motorsport IMAGES

contender in 2012 before again finishing as runner-up in a championship, this time to Antti Buri.

"We saw his development through a couple of different teams to becoming a regular podium finisher with a good number of victories," recalled series promoter Sam Roach. "It was a pleasure seeing him evolve and move up to higher formulas."

Cook progressed to the Formula Renault BARC category the following year with Hillspeed, finishing fifth, before taking second in the BRDC F4 Autumn Trophy standings. But he was unable to rise any further up the racing ladder and instead became a driver coach. He worked in MSA Formula, the replacement to British Formula Ford that later morphed into British F4, and

subsequently became a driving standards advisor, working with the officials at race weekends. He also married F4 championship manager Eve Lake-Grange.

"Jake was a really good friend to all of us in the championship," added Roach. "We had so many drivers come through our series, but to see someone return and give something back to the sport was great. He really enjoyed seeing the other side and giving his opinions as a successful driver – it was the first time we had done that. He was always smiling, always considerate and thoughtful – he was a calm influence on everything."

Autosport sends its best wishes to Eve and the rest of Cook's family and friends at this time.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**



Cook later became a coach and driving standards advisor

JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

## FIA medal winner to Fortec in F4

### BRITISH F4

Nina Pothof, a gold medal winner in the inaugural FIA Motorsport Games, has become the latest driver announced as competing in British Formula 4 next year after signing a deal with Fortec Motorsport.

The Dutch driver was previously an accomplished karter and took gold in the

karting slalom event in the 2019 Games. She subsequently contested various European endurance races in a Citroen C1 and BMW 325i, but is now ready for the move to single-seaters and has already begun testing.

"Nina is a talented young racer who has shone when she has been given opportunities, so we're

excited to see what we can achieve together throughout the season," said Fortec team manager Ollie Dutton.

"In particular, we will be focusing on her development and, while it will be a steep learning curve, we are confident that she will be up to speed and on the pace when the lights go out at the first round of the season."



Pothof moves from tin-tops to British F4



# Charity Atlantic rowing challenge for F5000 racer

## HISTORICS

Historics racer Neil Glover is teaming up with mountaineer Jason Black to tackle the Atlantic Dash rowing challenge in January as they bid to raise money for Sir Jackie Stewart's Race Against Dementia charity.

Glover, who has competed in a wide range of historic machinery and enjoyed success in the Aurora Trophy at the wheel of a Formula 5000 Chevron B37 in 2023, has been keen to enter the rowing race after stumbling across a YouTube video of the finish nearly five years ago. After previous plans to compete fell through, event organisers introduced him to Black, and the pair have since been training for the 3000-mile contest that lasts seven weeks. They will start in Lanzarote before travelling south towards Africa, then west to the finish line in Antigua.

"I've always been into extreme sport like Iron Man, and I've always been chasing this rainbow so it's taken over my life for the last 12 months," said Glover. "It's brutal but, between Jason and I, we want to enjoy this row and I want to be the best prepared. The mantra has been quite simple: we want to do it safely but I quite fancy winning it."

"We just want to crack on and get it done now! It will be three hours rowing, three



Glover will swap his Chevron (inset) for the Atlantic seas in January

hours off rowing for seven weeks, so it's brutal. We will burn up to 7000 calories a day and we'll be doing about 1.5 million oar strokes each!"

As well as wanting to win the race, Glover and Black are seeking to raise substantial funds for Race Against Dementia, the charity set up by Stewart to try to find a cure for the illness following his wife's diagnosis.

"It's not about the people that are doing this, it's about the cause - we want to raise £1million," said Glover. "Race Against Dementia have been great, they just need money to put a stop to this terrible illness."

Stewart added: "I am so pleased Jason Black and Neil Glover are rowing across the Atlantic in a boat called Destiny's Tide in support of Race Against Dementia. They are taking on a tremendous challenge and it means a lot to me that fellow motorsport enthusiasts are trying so hard to raise money to accelerate dementia research."

"I do hope that people involved in all sports will join the race and support Jason and Neil in their wonderful efforts to raise funds for Race Against Dementia."

To donate, head to [justgiving.com/page/destinys-tide](https://www.justgiving.com/page/destinys-tide)

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**

# Expensive tyres dropped from Magnificent Sevens

## MAGNIFICENT SEVENS

The Classic Sports Car Club is making several tweaks to the regulations and format of its Magnificent Sevens series for next year in an attempt to boost its grids, including outlawing more expensive, softer tyres.

Amid the majority of Caterham-based championships either moving or continuing to use Toyo R888R rubber ahead of the closure of the Avon factory, the CSCC has decided to follow suit and prevent drivers from using

the Avon ZZR Extreme, ZZR RT7, Kumho V70 Soft and Supersoft tyres in Magnificent Sevens. This means drivers will not need to buy or run grippier tyres to challenge those at the front of the category.

"Now, if you've got Toyos, you'll be up against other cars on Toyos," explained CSCC director Hugo Holder. "Anything that opens it up and makes it more attractive to people, hopefully, is a good thing. But we're not completely banning those stickier tyres - you can run those in Open Series."



STEVE JONES

The CSCC will be introducing specific classes for Sevens in the Open Series, where they will be able to use a far greater range of tyres. Magnificent Sevens will also revert to the traditional CSCC format of

40-minute pitstop races, after trialling two 30-minute contests per weekend this year, while winning drivers will now serve 10-second-longer pitstops rather than being given grid penalties.

**STEPHEN LICKORISH**



Deacon has enjoyed success  
in his Peugeot 106 this year



MIKE STOKES

## Hot Hatch star Deacon claims CCRC Driver of the Year trophy

### CCRC

Shaun Deacon (W-A-S Racing Peugeot 106 GTI) collected the Driver of the Year trophy at the Castle Combe Racing Club's annual awards dinner at Bristol's Future Inn last Saturday.

Deacon was the most successful Hot Hatch competitor in the category's final year as a series before becoming a championship for 2024. Combe champions Jamie Sturges (GT, VW Golf TCR), Mike Good (Saloons, Vauxhall Corsa) and Felix Fisher (TM Racing Ray, Formula Ford 1600) were also

honoured, along with Olly Samways and Neven Kirkpatrick, who won the CCRC-badged Mighty and Super Mighty Minis titles respectively.

Meanwhile, Mini Cooper S racer George Walker was named Sporting Billy Young Driver of the Year for his promising Saloon campaign.

Castle Combe Formula Ford stalwarts Alicia Hamlen and double champion Luke Cooper were also awarded limited edition Jonny Moore watches by Ed and Natasha Moore in recognition of their contribution to the championship.

MARCUS PYE

## Moore impresses in FF1600 Esports

### ESPORTS

Henry Moore's growing reputation as a global sim racing rising star was enhanced by winning one of four Formula Ford Festival Esports events over the weekend.

The son of two-time Castle Combe FF1600 champion Ed Moore and grandson of Ian Moore – who contested the circuit series before creating his own Swift cars in the late 1970s – Moore Jr has already showcased his talent in sim racing. The 15-year-old leads the Motorsport UK-backed UK FF1600 Esports Cup series with seven wins from 12 races.

Over the weekend, Moore competed in the Festival event on iRacing, which was based on the real-world Formula Ford Festival at Brands Hatch and supported by Motorsport UK

and the British Racing & Sports Car Club.

He won the final timeslot on Saturday after taking outright pole for three events, with fellow FF1600 rising star Jason Smyth winning two of the other events. The likes of Kelvin van der Linde, Jordan Kelly, Jeremy Fairbairn and Thomas Schrage also competed.

"He is self-taught, using a pretty standard rig, but puts an enormous focus into developing his ability," said Moore Sr. "I can't get near his lap times with the fixed-setting car used in the championship, but enjoy working on set-up, altering springs, dampers and rollbars in testing. His feedback is amazing.

"I don't want to sound like a racing dad, but Henry is quick on karts and I still have my Van Diemens, so it's down to him."

MARCUS PYE

## BARTON ON PODIUM AS HE MOVES TO MODERN GT RACING

### WRL

Two third places in the eight-hour enduros that comprised the World Racing League's eastern championship finale at Sebring earlier this month marked a successful transition to modern racing by ambitious British historic team Barton Racing's young protege Harry Barton.

Fresh from victory in last month's RAC Pall Mall Cup race at Silverstone in the team's TVR Griffith, 2022 Historic Touring Car champion Barton, 21, and coach/mentor Nigel Greensall finished on the lead lap both days in Barton's new Toyota GR Supra GT4 Evo.

"It's an absolutely glorious machine," said Greensall after the three-litre, 430bhp car (below) ran faultlessly over 492 laps of the brutal concrete WW2 airfield track in four days, the first two featuring testing and acclimatisation for Sebring debutant Barton.

Tended by UK-based Geoff Steel Racing's travelling technicians and supported by WRL champion team Thunder Bunny Racing from South Carolina, alongside its regular Gazoo Racing Supras, Barton and Greensall finished only 28.5 seconds behind TBR's winning car on Saturday, and 47s shy of NFC Motorsport's Mercedes-AMG GT4 on Sunday.

Described as "a dream debut" for Barton, the event presages a Transatlantic schedule in 2024. "We'll be back at Sebring for the Winterfest – six-hour and 90-minute races, plus sprints – in January, then bringing the car back home to contest a European GT4 championship with GSR," said Greensall. "It's all aimed at preparing Harry for Le Mans with a GT car in the future."

MARCUS PYE



PETER BAKER



# JCW Sport class details released ahead of 2024

## MINI CHALLENGE

More details have been revealed about the new JCW Sport class that will be introduced to the Mini Challenge next season.

The new sub-division is designed to help bridge the gap in terms of cost and performance between the Coopers of the Mini Challenge Trophy and the JCWs in the British Touring Car-supporting top-tier championship, as well as helping to boost grid numbers in the latter series.

The JCW Sport division will feature an F56 Mini with a two-litre engine that produces 225bhp compared to the 255bhp of the headline class. A six-speed OE H-pattern gearbox will also be used, in contrast to the Quaife sequential box in the JCWs.

In addition, there will be tighter restrictions on testing and tyres to reduce budgets, while entry fees will be lower. Existing JCW cars can be converted to JCW Sport-spec, meaning drivers do not need to buy a bespoke car for the new class.



“We’ve had a lot of interest in JCW Sport both from drivers who have been competing in the Cooper class but haven’t had the budget to move straight up into JCWs, and also from drivers who have been competing elsewhere,” said championship director Antony Williams. “We’re pleased to now be able to release more information about the specification of the car, which we are confident will provide fantastic racing on track when the 2024 season rolls around.”

Entries are now open for both the main JCW and JCW Sport classes, and drivers can get a discounted rate if they make a first payment before 8 December.

Series organisers had previously announced that a new scholarship contest would be held for next year, with the winner receiving a funded drive in the JCW Sport category. The initial stage of the competition was held at Capital Karts in London at the end of last month.

# GB4 Shootout victory and £20,000 for McCaughan



## GB4

Formula Ford racer Brandon McCaughan has won the end-of-season GB4 Championship Shootout and £20,000 to use towards a season in the single-seater series next year.

The 19-year-old, a race winner in National FF1600 over the past two years,

was competing in the shootout for the second time, after missing out on last year’s prize.

The Irishman went up against 17-year-old Canadian Nathan Yu, as both got behind the wheel of Fortec Motorsport’s GB4 machinery earlier this month.

“I’ve always had one

goal, which is to progress up the single-seater ladder, whether that be in America and going the IndyCar route, or staying in Europe and continuing through to GB3 maybe in the following years,” said McCaughan. “Winning the Shootout has definitely helped me to get that foot up.”

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Twenty examples of the new Ginetta G56 will be produced



## Improved cooling and greater aero highlights of new G56 Evo

### GT4

An evolution of Ginetta's G56 GT4 has been unveiled ahead of next season, with 20 cars set to be produced in 2024.

Key changes include improvements to the cooling with a redesigned bonnet, as well as greater aerodynamic efficiency with a revised rear wing. Adjustments have also been made to the suspension, roll development, a higher platform height, and larger wheels and tyres on both axles.

The car has been homologated for use in SRO series, including British GT, with half of the 20 cars set to be produced already reserved by existing customers.

Ginetta director of motorsport Mike Simpson said: "The 2024 G56 GT4 Evo

is an upgrade in every possible area. We have had many cars circulating in endurance racing in tough climates over the last few years, and the Evo upgrade is the accumulation of listening to customers/teams and developing what we believe is the best GT4 car on the market.

"We have strived for greater top speeds within the Balance of Performance management. Adding weight lower down in the chassis gives us some wins in safety and torsional stiffness.

"The increased weight and higher ride height of the car has allowed for more emphasis on the straightline capability of the Ginetta, making it a very competitive car for both gentlemen and professional drivers."

## Cottingham vows British GT revenge

### BRITISH GT

James Cottingham says he has "unfinished business" in the British GT championship after missing out on the title this season, but may not be around to attack it next year.

The 2 Seas Motorsport Mercedes-AMG driver entered the Donington Park finale last month leading the standings, but a poor weekend and second place for Dan Harper/Darren

Leung handed the Century Motorsport duo the crown.

Cottingham was the benchmark Am driver for much of the season, taking three wins alongside Jonny Adam at Oulton Park, the May Donington round and Portimao. He is intent on returning to the series to mount another title challenge, but admits that it may not be in 2024.

"Absolutely it's unfinished business, I have to come

back and have a go at the championship," said Cottingham. "Whether it will be next year or not I can't tell you.

"The difference between me and a lot of the other Ams is I'm still running a business every day of the week. Most of the other guys have sold their businesses or stepped back and can afford, both cost and time-wise, to go testing a lot. I just don't have the time to do that."

**STEFAN MACKLEY**

## GOODYEAR STICKS AROUND

Tyre giant Goodyear has extended its deal to be the control tyre supplier for TCR UK and its Civic Cup sister series into 2024. Goodyear has supplied TCR UK's rubber since its second season in 2019, initially through its Dunlop subsidiary. It has also backed the Diamond Trophy, for drivers aged 40 and over, for the past two years. "Announcing our continuing support as tyre partner shows our confidence in the stability and the future of TCR UK," said Goodyear's Mickey Butler.

## LULHAM BACK ON TRACK

Former karting champion and Formula 4 racer Chris Lulham is planning a return to the tracks next season in the Radical Cup UK. "I was karting for about seven years and, since 2019, I have been in the SIM Racing Pro World Cup, as part of Max Verstappen's Redline team," he said. He has been testing his own Radical SR3 RS, but had his first test in one of the new SR3 XXRs at Donington Park recently with Valour Racing.

## FIRST TASTE OF LIGIER

Jolt Racing gave its Ligier JSP4 its first official test at Silverstone last month, with John Ingram and Rupert Williams sharing the driving. The team formed at the beginning of this season with the aim of taking novice driver Williams to the Le Mans 24 Hours. The team has entered Citroen C1 races to get Williams his licence signatures, and will be heading to the Ligier European Series in 2024. For Ingram it's a return to racing after a 12-year absence, after previously contesting British F3.

## BRITISH GT4 FOR RAMYEAD

Ginetta GT Academy runner-up Ravi Rameyad is planning to move up to British GT4 next season after three years in Ginettas. He plans to continue his successful relationship with Century Motorsport and tested one of the team's BMW GT4s for the first time last week at Donington Park (below). "Compared to the Ginetta, it's a bit of caveman car to drive, so you have to be brave with it," said Rameyad.







**BTCC STARS SHINE IN BRISCA** Adam Morgan won the British Touring Car Challenge Trophy at Skegness Raceway on Saturday night as he went up against 11 other current or former BTCC stars that included Josh Cook, Jade Edwards, Aiden Moffat and Paul O'Neill. In a thrilling four-way battle for the lead in the closing stages, Morgan – who had never even seen a BriSCA F1 stock car before he sat in one on the night – came out on top to take the chequered flag, with long-time leader Ricky Collard second, Ryan Bensley third and Dan Rowbottom fourth. “It was my first time in these cars, my first time at the track, I just was smiling from ear to ear for the whole race,” said Morgan. “I’m hooked. We will all be back next year.” **Photographs by Colin Casserley**

# O'Donovan takes win on rally debut

## CIRCUIT RALLYING

British Rallycross champion Patrick O'Donovan was a dominant winner of last weekend's Cadwell Park Rally as he switched disciplines to make his rally debut on the second round of the Circuit Rally Championship.

Partnered by Jack Morton, the pair guided their Hyundai i20 R5 to the quickest time on seven of the eight stages to take victory by 33 seconds.

Paul Murro/Craig Simkiss led the initial pursuit with their Ford Fiesta R5, before reigning champions John Griffiths/Emma Morrison, also in a Fiesta R5, overcame a wrong tyre choice on the first two tests to consolidate second place from stage three, surviving a grassy run down the



Seven stage wins went to the double BRX champion

PETER SCHERER

Gooseneck one stage from home.

Despite an excursion onto the grass on stage six and hitting a bale chicane on the final run, Murro retained third. With Michael Igoe/Will Atkins (Fiesta Rally2) a final-stage retirement due to a puncture, that promoted Tony Robinson/Paul Spooner (Skoda Fabia R5) to fourth from the Darrian of Jason

and Lee Wilson and VW Polo GTI R5 pair John Stone/Laura Connell.

Notable retirements included first round winner Mark Kelly, whose Skoda Fabia R5 crashed out on the opening stage, and Ollie O'Donovan's i20 R5, which completed stage three with the rear of the car on fire.

**PETER SCHERER**





# Becoming the best

*The Porsche GB Junior and reigning Carrera Cup GB champion reviews his season and looks ahead to what's next*

ADAM SMALLEY

I would say that 2023 has been the best season of my life for numerous reasons. Being the Porsche GB Junior driver for the past two years has been a real privilege and, without that, I wouldn't be where I am today. I had a fantastic first season in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB, finishing runner-up in 2022, and that left one clear goal in mind for the second season, which was to go one step higher and win the championship.

This season, with Porsche and Team Parker Racing, I've had the right people around me to mature and develop as a person and as a driver. Winning the championship a round early at Silverstone was a dream come true, and to finish off the year with a win signed off a perfect season. We had 16 races and I had 14 podiums with a worst finish of fourth, so I'm forever grateful for everyone that made it possible.

Consistency was key and I kept a cool, level head all year. I knew we had the car to do the job, Team Parker has been fantastic, and Joe, my mechanic, and Will, my engineer, have worked tirelessly all year and put so much effort in to give me the best package, so it was nice to reward them with the results.

We took it race by race every single time. There was never any objective other than to try and win each race. You could see that at Silverstone in race one with the changing conditions, as it would have been very easy to settle for a lower finish, but I pushed all the way to the end for second place.

It's been a real privilege to be a BRDC SuperStar this year. It's something you look up to as a racing driver, seeing who's been on the programme. There are some amazing names that have been part of it, so when I got the phone call at the start of this season, saying I'd been selected, was amazing.

It's helped me this season, with the support of everyone, but also being in constant contact with lots of the other drivers has

been a massive benefit to me. We get a small bursary, which I used for some performance and nutritional areas and which is another small thing that helps add up to a successful year.

It was really cool to be on the main stage on the Formula 1 weekend at Silverstone with the SuperStars. It's so nice that the British Racing Drivers' Club showcases the drivers and gives them the spotlight at somewhere like the British Grand Prix. It's something I won't forget.

This season, I've had so much time in the car. I raced at Silverstone in the Porsche Supercup, and we had a great showing there. Unfortunately, I made a mistake off the line, dropped down, but then fought back through to a solid finish in the end. Competing on a world stage in front of a home crowd was amazing.

I also did Carrera Cup Deutschland, which was definitely a challenge. We were very unlucky with what happened but, nevertheless, it was still a really good experience to go out there, work closely with Proton Competition – a very well-respected team – drive on some amazing tracks, and gain a lot of experience that helped me in my Carrera Cup GB campaign.

Through the Porsche Junior programme, I was able to compete at the Goodwood Festival of Speed, winning my class and getting a medal, and then racing at the Goodwood Revival. I've done some incredible things this year and I probably should sit down and look back at it all!

The Porsche Carrera Cup GB organisation put me forward for the Supercup Junior shootout, which was an incredible experience. It was over three days, so it's quite intense, there's a lot of stuff going on. On the first day it was all just media interviews, medical checks, mental checks, knowledge tests, so there's a lot we needed to know. Then the second and third day was in-car assessments.

It was a really cool event. I don't know how I did but I gave it my all. It was amazing to see so many champions from so many different Carrera Cups around the world all in one place, all fighting for the same thing. It's definitely an event that I'll remember, and we should find out this week who was successful. There's a one in 12 chance of getting it but we'll just have to see the outcome.

I don't know what the future holds and it's a strange feeling. The Porsche Junior programme is over, and those two years have absolutely flown by. Now it's a case of weighing up the best options. I'm still a Silver-ranked driver, which is useful. I have a few opportunities, but it's seeing what is the best fit not only for myself, but my sponsors as well. It's probably the most important few weeks of my life, to be honest, because whatever route I pick to go down defines where my career is going to go. ✨







ROGER ALBERT CLARK RALLY

## A TRIUMPH OF ENGINEERING

*When the gruelling Roger Albert Clark Rally starts this morning, international ace Chris Ingram is due to take on the Ford Escort hordes in a painstakingly produced TR7 V8*

PAUL LAWRENCE

PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL LAWRENCE

**A** week ago, dressed in a period correct British Leyland rally jacket and sporting the beginnings of a Tony Pond-style moustache, Chris Ingram – one of Britain's best young rally drivers of a generation – stood quietly at a deserted Sweet Lamb test venue looking at the Triumph TR7 V8. Almost in awe of the machine, Ingram was about to step back 40 years to a different time and a different type of rally car. Minutes later, after barely five miles of gravel running, he returned with a big smile.

That first test was the initial step towards the five-day Roger Albert Clark Rally adventure through the forests of Wales, Scotland and England that is due to finish in Carlisle next Monday afternoon. Alongside the 156 other starters, Ingram

more than anything wants to finish the longest and toughest special stage rally in Britain.

Like fellow international standard drivers Kris Meeke, Oliver Solberg and Osian Pryce, 2019 European Rally champion Ingram was keen to tackle the contest that revives the spirit and challenge of the RAC Rallies of the 1960s and 1970s. Long days, not much sleep, stages in the dark, brutal Kielder, and a massive sense of adventure all mean the event is far removed from the modern-day European and World Rally Championship events.

But unlike his famous rivals, Ingram is not in a Ford Escort Mk2. Instead, he's driving the newly finished TR7 V8 from David Appleby Engineering and the car is truly a work of art. It's one of a batch of six built at the team's base in Somerset.





*“I love it and it instantly put a big smile on my face! An absolute beast, so different to anything I’ve driven”*



Tony Pond and Fred Gallagher in action on Corsica in 1978 (left) and on the 1980 RAC

Long-time marque expert Appleby is painstakingly producing the cars to exacting period specification using an ex-Pond machine as a benchmark, with most parts remanufactured.

Appleby worked for Austin Rover Motorsport in the 1980s and competed extensively. He has a long history with British Leyland cars, from TR7 V8s through Rovers to Metro 6R4s, and later did his own updated version of the 6R4 in the DAM 4100.

“It’s something I’ve had a passion to do for a long time: a proper recreation of factory TR7 V8s,” explains Appleby. “We’ve had an ex-Roger Clark car, one of the last works cars, on loan to use as a datum and we’ve been able to take bits off, get them measured and scanned and remade. Everything is to original specification. We could have done a modern interpretation of the car, but what would be the point in that?”

The quality of engineering and attention to detail is outstanding on a project that has been several years in the making. New engine blocks were produced and most components had to be remade. By putting in an entry for the Roger Albert Clark, Appleby stuck a post in the ground: the car had to be ready by mid-November and it took a super-human effort to hit the date. >>



*“The car’s absolutely brand new. We want to finish the event and just enjoy this opportunity”*



With the car nearing completion, Appleby needed a driver, and discussions with Ingram started in the spring. “We know we’ve got the talent in this country to compete at world level, but for some reason we don’t give the backing to these young drivers,” asserts Appleby. “I’ve been watching Chris and what he’s done and I think it’s fantastic. He reminds me of Tony Pond in a lot of ways. He is more than capable of doing very well.”

Finally, last Wednesday on a remote Welsh hillside, it all came together and Ingram got to try the car for his maiden outing. It was an anxious occasion all round as the car took to gravel for the very first time.

The answer came quickly when Ingram toured back into the on-site workshop after a handful of miles. “I love it and it instantly put a big smile on my face!” recalls Ingram. “It’s an absolute beast and so different to anything I’ve driven before, but it felt really good straight out of the box. It’s incredible what David and the team have done. It just pulls and pulls in the gears and it’s got so much torque.”

For a driver more used to four-wheel drive, sequential gearboxes, multi-adjustable dampers and turbo engines in Rally2 machinery, it’s no wonder the TR7 felt somewhat alien. Yet Ingram’s initial speed was good and the car looked and sounded spot on. But they all realise the scale of the task they face.

“It’s going to be an amazing challenge,” predicts Ingram. “It’s my first historic rally and first time driving a proper historic car. It’s become such an iconic event and I’m really grateful for the opportunity. It’s a big deal for David to let me drive this beautiful beast and I think the fans will love it.

“The car’s absolutely brand new. We want to finish the event and just enjoy this amazing opportunity to do a five-day classic R.A.C. We’ve not got any performance targets as such. I’m under strict orders to get it to the finish.

“That would be a fantastic achievement.” ✨

## THE LEADING CONTENDERS ON THE ROGER ALBERT CLARK

Until Ryan Champion blended speed and consistency to win the 2021 event in a Porsche 911 from the Tuthill stable, the Roger Albert Clark Rally had been dominated by Ford Escorts, mainly Mk2s, across its 20-year history. And although Chris Ingram in the Triumph TR7 V8 and Seb Perez in a glorious Lancia Stratos will wow the fans, there is every probability that overall victory will return to the firm grasp of the Escort Mk2 hordes this year.

With international stars Kris Meeke, Oliver Solberg and Osian Pryce all lining up in full-spec historic Mk2s alongside established Mk2 aces such as Martin McCormack, Jason Pritchard, Roger Chilman, Paul Barrett and Matthew Robinson, the Escort onslaught is ferocious. The ubiquitous BDG-engined Mk2 remains the weapon of choice in historic rallying, and it’s little wonder that Meeke, Solberg and Pryce all opted to take the Escort route with barely a glance towards other options.

Richard Tuthill will once again put up the



Oliver Solberg is among the Escort Mk2 hordes

Porsche challenge in the 911 used by Champion in 2021, and has the pace to mix it with the big boys, while Gregoire de Mevius brings his wonderful Nissan 240RS from Belgium. But the newer generation of historic cars has yet to make an impression on the event. Kevin Procter’s Ford Sapphire Cosworth has had a troubled time so far while, further down the order, Darren Martin switches to a Subaru Legacy.

Another notable non-Escort entry is the Chrysler Avenger of ex-Formula 1 TV pundit Tony Jardine, whose fortunes Autosport will be following throughout the event. Like Solberg’s Escort, Jardine will be using sustainable fuel to tackle the marathon contest.

But, ultimately, it’s hard to see much that will truly mix it with the Escorts across five days, unless Ingram can pull off a monster result with the rumbling TR7 V8.





The R.A.C will mark  
Ingram's historic  
rallying debut



Seb Perez adds  
welcome diversity  
with his Stratos



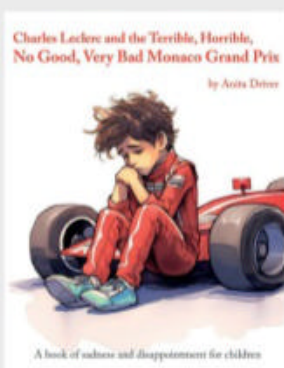
# FINISHING STRAIGHT

Satire meets children's story

for a tale of F1 woe



PETIN



## BOOK REVIEW

### CHARLES LECLERC AND THE TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD MONACO GRAND PRIX

Author Anita Driver  
RRP: £11.99

Charles Leclerc has now failed to convert any of his past 12 Formula 1 pole positions into a race win. But if this wasn't enough to pile on the misery for Leclerc, Anita Driver takes a satirical view of the Ferrari man's record at his home race.

*Charles Leclerc and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Monaco Grand Prix* is a bizarre yet compelling "book of sadness and disappointment for children", which follows the journey of the titular driver from a child watching from his window, to the race winning F1 competitor of the modern day.

While, obviously, based on real world events and the fabled 'Monaco Curse' that has haunted Leclerc throughout his career, it would be advisable not to take this book too seriously or as fact – especially if you happen to be reading this while working

in the Ferrari legal department!

Much as with Driver's other release previously reviewed by Autosport – *Overtake My Heart: Thicc Ric races for love* (featured in the 21 September edition, for those interested) – the dedication sets the tone for what is to come. "Dedicated to Charles Leclerc. Someone please rescue him from his Ferrari contract."

A key factor of a children's book is having a good rhythm and flow to the words and this is present throughout, with pages largely of between eight and 10 lines. Again, a theme of children's books is a rhyming structure. While this is present, some of the rhymes are more than a little contrived for comedic effect.

Keeping to the topic of things commonly found in children's books, the illustrations are absolutely beautiful, with highly stylised and brightly coloured images that demand attention. One memorable example is a less than flattering image of then-Ferrari team principal Mattia Binotto, which caused a belly laugh. This was only added to by the fictional quote timed during the 2022 race as Leclerc led: "He can't win this race, that's not the Ferrari way. Let's screw up his strategy and end this display."

Moving back briefly to the images,

there is one distraction that cannot be ignored once noticed, where an on-track crash is depicted with cars that lack drivers. A minor gripe and not one that a child may notice, but one that remains nonetheless.

The best thing about this book is the clear knowledge and love of Formula 1 with which it has been written. Yes, it is pure satire, but Ferrari mechanics responding "we are checking" to strategy queries, and the suggestion that Leclerc should switch



Leclerc's record at his home race unlikely to make him smile

GRANT





Leclerc's 2021 Monaco Grand Prix: terrible, horrible, no good, very bad

ALL PHOTOGRAPHY  
 motorsport IMAGES

to “plan M” in the infamous alphabet of strategy plans, reflect this passion and are guaranteed to make fans laugh or, perhaps more appropriately if they are also Ferrari aficionados, cry.

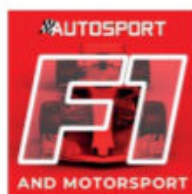
One final thing that is commonplace in children’s literature is a moral at the conclusion. Without spoiling what this is in this instance, it’s one that recent on-track performances may contradict, but one that remains amusing all the same.

During this review, we have frequently referred to this as a children’s book. But as an adult, this review can only be so authentic. To get the real picture from a child, we have once again called on the unofficial Autosport toddler intern.

While being read with suitable articulations and poorly recreated accents, there were real moments of concern for Leclerc as well as moments of laughter. But as was expected, it was the imagery that got the biggest reaction, with the aforementioned picture of Binotto that got the biggest laugh.

For F1 fans with children, this is certainly a book that can be recommended and one that will provide entertainment for both parents and their offspring – just don’t take it too seriously!

**SAM HALL**



[autosport.com/podcast](https://www.autosport.com/podcast)



**Las Vegas Grand Prix review**

The Las Vegas Grand Prix saw multiple leaders and battles throughout the field, with incidents and penalties ultimately deciding the podium order. Martyn Lee is joined by our experts to discuss how the race was won. Filip Cleeren is in Las Vegas, plus we’re joined by Jake Boxall-Legge and Sam Hall.



**WHAT’S ON**

**INTERNATIONAL MOTORSPORT**

**Abu Dhabi Grand Prix**  
**F1 World Championship**  
**Round 22/22**

Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi  
**26 November**  
**TV Live** Sky Sports F1, Sun 1255  
**TV Highlights** Sky Sports F1, Sun 1630, Channel 4, 1730

**Formula 2**  
**Round 13/13**

Yas Marina, Abu Dhabi  
**25-26 November**  
**TV Live** Sky Sports F1, Sat 1215, Sun 0910

**Valencia Grand Prix**  
**MotoGP Round 20/20**

Valencia, Spain  
**25-26 November**  
**TV Live** TNT Sports 2, Sat 1330, Sun 1330, ITV1, 1200  
**TV Highlights** ITV4, 2000

**Australian Supercars**  
**Round 12/12**

Adelaide, Australia  
**25-26 November**  
**TV Live** TNT Sports 2, Sat 0400, Sun 0400

**Brazilian Stock Car Championship**  
**Round 11/12**

Cascavel, Brazil  
**26 November**  
**TV Live** Livestream Motorsport.tv, Sun 0430







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## TOP FIVE



## FORMULA 1 FINALE VENUES

Yas Marina will become the most-used destination for an F1 finale this weekend. But 2021 drama aside, it has lacked thrilling moments. We rate the best

JAMES NEWBOLD

PHOTOGRAPHY  motorsport  
IMAGES

#### 5 WATKINS GLEN

F1 racing at Watkins Glen will forever be associated with the accidents that claimed Francois Cevert and Helmuth Koinigg. And only in 1974, when Emerson Fittipaldi defeated Clay Regazzoni, was the world title up for grabs in the eight occasions it hosted the finale between 1961 and 1980. But what it lacks there, the undulating upstate New York track makes up for in character.



#### 4 MEXICO CITY

In a seven-year run hosting the final round, none could match the drama of the 1964 Mexican Grand Prix that ended with John Surtees claiming the spoils thanks to Jim Clark's late engine woe and astute Ferrari tactics. Graham Hill had entered that race leading the points, but a fine victory in 1968 to clinch his second title over Jackie Stewart made up for his disappointment four years prior.



#### 3 SUZUKA

Some of Suzuka's most famous F1 moments occurred prior to it staging the finale for the first time in 1996. But even if Prost-Senna shenanigans aren't counted here, there were plenty of great moments from a truly magic track during three stints as the season closer. Triumphs for Mika Hakkinen in 1998-99 extended Ferrari's long title wait, but eighth was enough for Michael Schumacher in 2003.



#### 2 INTERLAGOS

Risk of rain always brings an element of jeopardy to the Brazilian Grand Prix weekend, amplifying the spectacle when it staged the final round on seven occasions between 2004 and 2013. Beyond Lewis Hamilton's last-gasp 2008 efforts, the showdown in 2012 is in the conversation as one of the best ever, while Michael Schumacher went down fighting on his 2006 farewell.



#### 1 ADELAIDE

Yas Marina will only surpass its status as the most frequented final round venue this weekend, having held the honour in 11 years from 1985 to 1995. But the street track gets top billing also because its driving challenge is right up there, while the events of 1994 held claim to be the most controversial at a title decider until 2021. As for 1986? "And colossally, that's Mansell" is TV gold.







#### FROM THE ARCHIVE

Francois Cevert adopts a sublime angle of drift in his Tyrrell 006 during the 1973 British Grand Prix at Silverstone. Somewhat off the pace of team-mate Jackie Stewart,

the Frenchman qualified seventh, one place behind the McLaren M23 of Jody Scheckter, who at the end of the race's opening lap triggered one of Formula 1's most infamous incidents, his loss of control, resulting spin and

the crash that followed eliminating nine cars. Cevert managed to evade the chaos, and in the restarted race finished a lonely fifth, the depleted field nevertheless helping to bolster his third place in the points.

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# Gerhard Berger

**T**he careers of Jean Alesi and Gerhard Berger feel entwined, given their five Formula 1 seasons as team-mates and simultaneous moves from Ferrari to Benetton for 1996.

After three years at McLaren, Berger rejoined Ferrari in 1993 as an eight-time grand prix winner, scoring four of those successes during three previous seasons at Maranello. Ironically, given the genial relationship that lay ahead, Alesi immediately viewed Berger's arrival as a big threat.

"I was shocked about this very bad season we had in 1992," says Alesi. "But I was giving my maximum as always, to keep [morale in] the team up. When they signed Gerhard for 1993, he arrived as a doctor, you know, an experienced driver to fix the team. That annoyed me a lot.

"*Gazzetta dello Sport* reported all the details of his contract as number one driver, so I complained to Niki [Lauda] and he was super as always: 'Jean, don't worry', he said, 'just ask for more money!' I said, 'Niki, I don't give a shit about money, I just want the same status as him.' So, he said he would talk to [Luca] di Montezemolo, and he came back the next day to tell me he'd arranged for me to be gifted an F1 car from 1992! I said, 'No, Niki, that was not



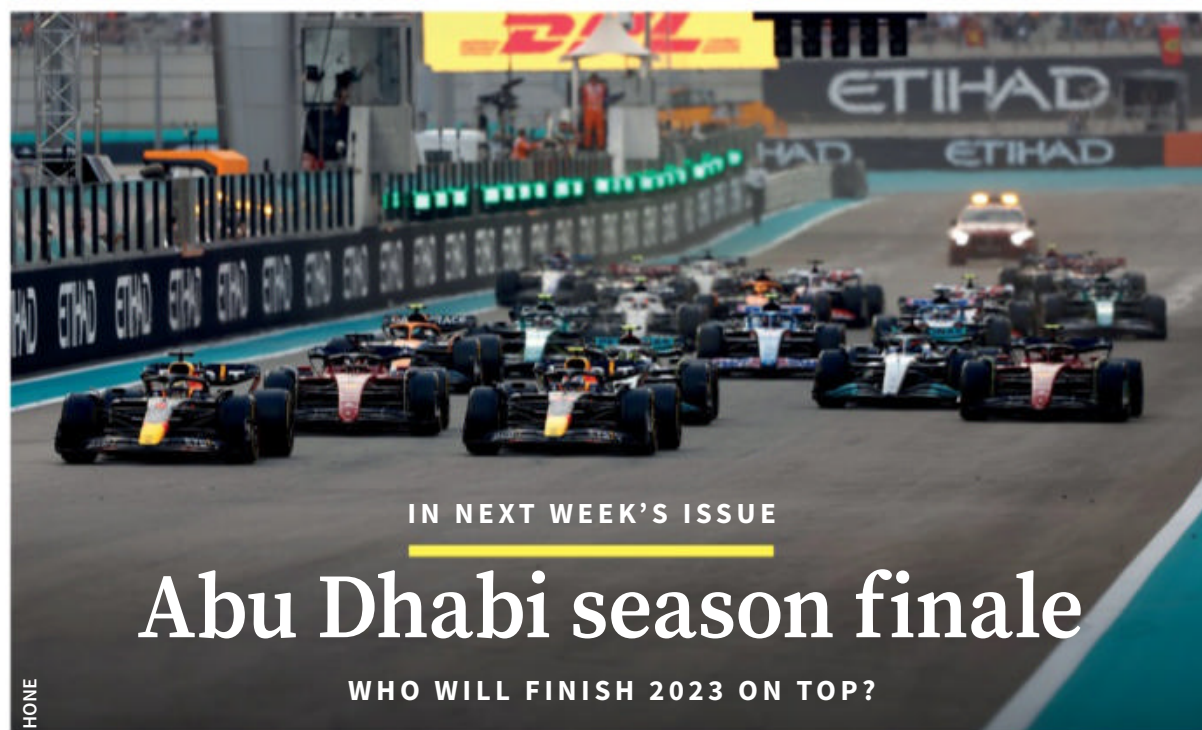
what I asked for...' but it worked out OK.

"When we started work together, I found Gerhard a very fair person, he was very straight. And this I liked. Of course, he was a great competitor and we fought hard sometimes, but he understood that this position as 'number one' was not really useful to him, so he never went to the team and demanded more testing or the spare car or anything. We had equal treatment."

They started as team-mates in 77 grands prix from 1993 to 1997; three years together at Ferrari, then two more at Benetton from 1996, as Michael Schumacher and Eddie Irvine replaced them.

Between them they won three races as team-mates, with Berger winning in Germany in 1994 and 1997, and Alesi's sole career victory coming in the 1995 Canadian GP. Alesi reflects: "With Gerhard, I always had the best times."

**CHARLES BRADLEY**



IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

## Abu Dhabi season finale

WHO WILL FINISH 2023 ON TOP?

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